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THE LEGACY

A STORY OF A WOMAN

BY

MARY S. WATTS

AUTHOR OF "NATHAN BURKE," ETC.

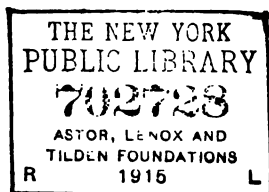


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THE LEGACY

A STORY OF A WOMAN

BOOK FIRST: OLD EDWARD BREEN

CHAPTER I

THE house stood at the end of Muskingum Street; or rather, as one might say, at the reputed end, for it was on the edge of the ridge whence the street began to go morally and physically down hill; and although there were plenty of houses and people in those farther depths, nobody knew or wanted to know anything about them,—so to all social intents and purposes this house was the last. It was much older than Muskingum Street, as old as the town itself, a pioneer house; you would have discovered heavy log walls under its surface of clapboards. Nothing but the fact that all through its long life, though the home of many different families in succession and bought and sold repeatedly, it had never been owned or occupied by any but gentlefolks, saved it from becoming as unrecognizable, conventionally, as its neighbors under the hill; but just as it had defied the wilderness a century ago, so now in 1878 it held a final post against the slums.

A big yard bound in by retaining walls six or seven feet high—for it was all on the slant of the hill—strengthened this isolation. The house, set back among ancient trees and rank lawns and disordered flower-beds, offered an inhospitable gable-end to Muskingum Street and

fronted, by the irony of circumstances, towards the unspeakable regions at the base of the slope, for, in times past, this position had commanded a grandly opening view of the river and its opposite shores — a view now neatly blotted out by the soap factory and a welter of shanties and tenements. There was only one approach; visitors and vegetables, the milkman and the minister, were obliged by a sovereign impartiality to enter at the same place a little to the rear on the Muskingum Street side, where there was a rusty old iron grille at the bottom of a breakneck flight of a dozen or so stone steps through the walls. When you had breathlessly gained the summit, you beheld two paths: this laid in bricks led to the front door; that of worn limestone flagging curved around the house to the kitchen. They were in an equal state of disrepair; ragged rose-bushes and thickets of lilac sprawled across them. Altogether, the gate presented something of a romantic, sequestered look to anybody possessing the least briskness of fancy; but so dull is maturity in that respect that to the older members of the Breen household the gate was merely the gate, whereas to little Letty Breen, ten years of age, it was the postern, and she was privately of opinion that half a score of stout fellows with pikes or arquebuses might dispute it against an army.

Likewise, nobody but Letty discerned the real quality and nature of the house. It had three square rooms, side by side along the front, with three more of lighter build added along the back at some later date, and a half-story over all, with three dormer-windows projecting on the porch roof, added at a later date still, when the clapboarding was done to give the patches and the original structure a look of uniformity on the outside at any rate; but only Letty suspected that this entire building was really a blockhouse in the frontier forests of Ohio, on the banks of the Muskingum River, and that it was likely to be besieged at any moment by the sav-

age tribes roaming in great numbers the valley of the Muskingum down below at the foot of the hill, which they ignorantly supposed to be Second Street. Old Mr. Edward Breen never dreamed that he lived now in a castle of Picardy, now in an English manor-house, now (during the freezing winter months) in a Viking hall; on the contrary, he thought with sufficient bitterness — when he allowed himself to think about it at all — that the place was a miserable rattletrap mortgaged to its rickety old roof that was ready to fall down over his head. His little granddaughter was not in the habit of confiding these fantastic notions of hers to him or to any one; she was a shy child and shrinkingly afraid of her elders' laughter.

Those three main rooms of the Breen house, notwithstanding the many spectacular disguises they assumed according to Letty, would not have seemed particularly inspiring to any less industrious imagination. They were of one size, the walls covered alike with a kind of dimly shining paper whereon small pale flowers appeared in vague ranks on a background that contrived to be colorless, yet was not white. There was flat, plain woodwork painted white, or what had been white in the beginning; like the paper, it had acquired a decided, yet absolutely nameless, tint with passing years and neglect. Huge oblong iron locks with disproportionately minute brass knobs, and keys half a foot long, were attached to all the doors — engines which were perpetually getting out of order and being tinkered at by Letty's mother, who had a gift in that direction. The openings of the ancient fireplaces had been filled in to accommodate the coal grates of recent days, but there were still to be seen the old uneven brick hearths and the old, high, narrow mantel-shelves. The window-sashes were divided in six panes of greenish, blistered glass; there was a fan-light over the front door, and lights on either side of it, ground glass with

a pattern in clear glass of grape-vines and clusters of leaves disposed in a sort of mathematical disorder all the way up to the top. The old house was conceived in a style to cause the amateur of things architectural nowadays to throw up his hat and rejoice; in Letty Breen's childhood people considered it dreadfully antiquated and uncomfortable, without gas, plumbing, or conveniences of any kind, and indeed not worth these improvements — hardly even worth repairing.

The door with the fan-lights opened into the middle room, which was furnished with a red and blue ingrain carpet on the floor; a stupendous old mahogany sofa; a high-shouldered mahogany bookcase with glass doors to the upper half and columns with ornate capitals up the sides, and a middle drawer which, upon pressing a spring, mysteriously let down and became a desk; a round mahogany table, with a top of black marble veined with yellow; and finally four mahogany and black haircloth chairs with a slat shaped like a lyre up the backs. Around on the cloudy wall-paper there were half a dozen sallow old steel-engravings in black and gilt frames, each one hung by a red woollen cord from a mighty picture-nail with a china top as big as a dollar. The seeming miracle of how such a nail could be driven without smashing the head to atoms at the first blow was made clear to Letty one day during housecleaning when she saw her mother mount the step-ladder while Mrs. Hatfield held it firm, and with an able hand — for all her motions were vigorous and well directed — unscrew the china head in one turn! The pictures in their order were "George Washington," "Martha Washington," "William Penn signing the Treaty with the Indians, Shackamaxon, November 30, 1682," "View of Arundel Castle, Seat of the Duke of Norfolk, County of Sussex, England," "Church of Saint Andrew, Charlottesville, New Jersey," and underneath the last, a picture which was not an engraving,

but a small reproduction of a face in profile cut out of black paper and stuck on a square of white. This person had a long, straight nose, and a long chin, and one single eyelash remarkably well defined; also a high collar and bush of ruffles at the throat, and hair combed smooth and tied with a ribbon bow at the back of the neck as well as Letty could judge by the outlines. Her own thick, dark hair was dressed in this fashion; and partly for that reason she was for a good while in uncertainty whether the silhouette represented a man or a woman, rather inclining to the latter view.

This room was called the hall, or sometimes the library; the bedrooms on either hand, the dining-room at the rear, all the rest of the house, even to 'Lizbeth Hurd's virginal retreat upstairs under the roof with its ceiling at half a dozen different angles,—all of it matched both in shabbiness and in a certain high air of gentility, spite of the shabbiness. The same freckled engravings hung everywhere on the same fog-tinted walls, their order broken only by an occasional oil-painting, a dingy landscape with gravy-colored skies, or family portrait, the eyes whereof sought one uncannily to the farthest corner of the apartment. There were more mahogany sofas and chairs covered with the deathless horsehair of 1825 or '30; lame, dented brassware; candelabra and girandoles with half the prisms gone; everything was faded, nicked, chipped, threadbare. Yet a queer kind of physical dignity clung about this host of veterans; even in painful age, they upheld their caste.

Letty, upon inquiry, discovered that she had been born in this house. That is to say, she had been heard and hunted for and eventually found crying behind the woodshed one November night, she being then a little and exceedingly new baby. And her mother who was sick in bed at the time, having (providentially) on hand a large stock of suitable clothing, it was decided

to take Letty in and christen her. She was advised, if she didn't believe the tale, to look at the woodshed still standing in confirmation; and furthermore, there was that old trunk full of the same identical baby-clothes up in the garret! Indeed, Letty had often examined them, her small, womanly soul delighting in the delicate needlework and charming elfin proportions of these garments. She got all the above information from 'Lizabeth Hurd when 'Lizabeth was in a gracious mood, which did not occur too often; but her reliability could not be questioned. She had lived with them, maid-of-all-work, with Mrs. Hatfield coming in to do the washing, for fifteen years; only in the pre-historic or pre-Letty days there was no Mrs. Hatfield. The washerwoman was Mrs. Somebody-else, or a succession of them. All washerwomen came from Second Street, where there grew and flourished the washerwoman family, tribe, genus, or species; they were distinctly the *fauna* of Second Street.

But notwithstanding the circumstantial exactness of 'Lizabeth's story, which never varied in the slightest, notwithstanding the corroborative testimony of the woodshed and garret, notwithstanding her own lifelong familiarity with this house and yard and soap-factory perspective, the child, like many other children who happen to be fanciful and much alone, sometimes imagined that she remembered being for a while in another and totally different place. It was always night there — a notion in itself so wild that even Letty recognized its improbability; but it was always night, with lamps burning and throwing strange shadows on the ceiling of the bedroom, which was not like the ceiling of her mother's bedroom here in Muskingum Street, but much higher and whiter, without any cracks. The floor had a white carpet with roses on it; in the middle of it there was a valise opened out, and standing beside it the wash-basket full of clean clothes; it was cold, be-

cause the fire had gone out, and — and — At this point Letty's memory or imagination invariably failing her, she had once applied to her mother, only to be answered in the latter's usual dry, curt, and sensible manner, that she must have dreamed all that, or got it out of some book, that she must not keep running to her elders with silly stories, and that little girls should be seen and not heard. Letty accepted this ruling meekly; she was of an obedient and pacific disposition, and, never having any companionship but that of grown-up people, was accustomed to being told what she ought to do and, frequently, what she ought to think. It was not an atmosphere to stimulate the development of character.

The isolation in which the child lived was strange enough, had she known it. Few people, setting aside tradesmen with bills and at too rare intervals a carpenter or mason, ever visited the Muskingum Street house; the family went out seldom. The only personages of importance in Letty Breen's world, or of whom she had any authentic memory, were her grandfather, her mother, and 'Lizbeth Hurd. Of these, the quick, silent, indefatigable woman who heard Letty say her prayers and her daily lessons with a businesslike impartiality, nursed her through various childish illnesses with a kind of methodical tenderness, and filled her life with rules of conduct preposterously narrow and severe, yet somehow never petty, — this woman was hardly more of a companion for the little girl as mothers are commonly supposed to be than if she had owned a totally different name, or belonged to another race. As to 'Lizbeth, Letty in no case would have been permitted to make friends with her or any other servant, such a proceeding being contrary to the Breen creed and tradition; and, strange to say, 'Lizbeth herself would have been the first to frown upon the attempt. For all the years she had worked in this household, 'Lizbeth was, on the surface at least, the very reverse of that

kindly figure, the old, attached, faithful follower. Week by week, she grimly earned her wage, neither asking nor receiving more.

But both 'Lizbeth and her mother, though older and greater than herself by immeasurable years, stature, and knowledge, occupied, in the child Letty's mind, a very subordinate and inconsiderable position, compared to the figure of her grandfather, who dominated her whole landscape, equally awesome and admirable. He was so tall and impressive in his black broadcloth, his linen which was always white and fresh, no matter if — as Letty was well aware — every one else in the household had to go without clean clothes, because of difficulties with the Mrs. Hatfield of the hour. He had thick brilliantly white hair brushed back in a high wave above his straight forehead; and thick white brows over his strong old black eyes, which had never needed glasses yet. His smooth-shaved face and rather small features were delicately Roman in outline; he had lean and beautiful hands with which he sometimes made slight gestures. Whether he was writing at the mahogany bookcase-desk, or reading in his room, or magnificently reciting grace at the head of the table over the meagre remains of yesterday's meagre joint, or puttering elegantly about the rose-bushes, old Mr. Edward Breen always appeared in a splendid detachment to his granddaughter's view, like a hero of romance — a king in exile. And that he should never be busy with anything except the graceful occupations of leisure, whereas everybody else was always desperately hard at work, seemed to Letty the most natural thing in the world. She was quite certain her grandfather was capable of doing anything; he had such an air of authority and power in reserve. She knew, too, that her mother could do anything, for, in fact, there was little that Letty had not seen her do, from putting up preserves, laying carpets, and — jointly with 'Lizbeth

Hurd — whitewashing the cellar, to crocheting lace for Letty's own clothes, and leading the youngster through geography and the multiplication table. But these activities were somehow of a different order from what might be expected of Mr. Breen; the idea of *his* tacking down a carpet was inconceivable. Once Letty remembered to have seen the old gentleman, while casually sauntering about the yard, come suddenly upon her mother beating a feather-bed hung out on a line behind the house; the lady, with her sleeves rolled up around her thin arms, her fair hair a little tousled, and a flushed face, was wielding a flail energetically amid the dust and flying bits of down. They both stopped short in an inordinate confusion; it was as if Mr. Breen had caught his daughter-in-law filching from a neighbor's pantry shelves. The child standing by was conscious of something distressing in the scene. "You — you ought to call one of the — the servants, Martha," her grandfather said, crimsoning all over his fine old face, and backing off; "call — call Elizabeth."

"Oh, I'm just trying to beat it a little for — for fun — just to see if I could, you know," said Mrs. Breen, in a voice of determined lightness. And the old gentleman walked hurriedly away.

The neighborhood was populous, but stern edicts restrained Letty from speaking to or noticing at all the washerwomen, the factory hands, the children who swarmed under those high walls of the Breen yard. For that matter, Letty had grown to be more or less afraid of these latter, who were indeed dreadful, grimy, ill-conditioned young ruffians of both sexes, racing and yelling and brawling, and making faces of goblin hideousness whenever they caught a glimpse of her. She was not far astray in likening them privately to the Comanches of Fenimore Cooper, with whom, as also with the knights and ladies of Sir Walter, she was a good deal better acquainted than with any actual per-

son. The little lonely child made a society for herself out of those great tales ; she might have done worse, for if it was somewhat comically old-fashioned, it was still a society of gentlefolks. It was augmented from time to time as Letty grew older, and began to feel more curiosity about her own antecedents, by a set of what might be called hypothetical relatives, constructed to fit the oil portraits, one or two photographs, and a multitude of daguerreotypes neatly stacked in their embossed cases on the black marble table. Letty had never seen any of the originals, although she had been told their names ; and became quite expert at capturing the faces in the daguerreotypes which had the habit peculiar to that art of coyly evading inspection except in certain lights and positions. She identified one young man, with profuse black side-whiskers, a double watch chain, and plaid trousers, as Uncle Tom — Thomas Breen ; a fat little boy in a kilt and velvet jacket was Uncle Will — another Breen, grown up, of course, since this was taken, and dwelling afar like all the rest of them. These were both brothers of her father whose name Letty knew to have been Harry, but of whom there seemed to be no picture. As it happened there were none of her mother or of Letty herself ; she had a hazy idea that this omission was due to the monstrous cost of picture taking. The child knew that there was not much money to spend in the household, though how would have been hard to say, since she had no means of comparison, and the subject was never discussed before her ; talking about money, little Letty had been trained to think, was underbred. One of her chief favorites in this imitation world and the one about whom she invented the most flowery of her romances was a plump and striking-looking lady, apparently some twenty-five years of age, with a high carriage of the head, — which was dressed in a remarkable fashion with ringlets, a scarf, aigrette, and what-not, — black eyes, and features so

strongly resembling old Mr. Edward Breen's that it was natural enough to hear she was his sister, Aunt — or, properly, Great-aunt — Helen. Her name, to the public, was Mrs. Von Donhoff, and she lived in Europe, in South America, in India, in everywhere under the sun! She was an object of lively speculation to the youngster Letty; think of that turban and bird-o'-Paradise plume floating and fluttering at kings' levees — amongst hordes of savages — on the high seas! For such, she was given to understand, had been commonplace incidents of Aunt Helen's career. It savored of the "Arabian Nights." This heroine must be, by now, well upwards of sixty, but she flourished on Letty's stage, with her curls and her full figure, in perennial youth.

Besides these, there were two notable photographs on large cards, rather yellow and faded, though kept with care in a morocco portfolio in the bookcase drawer. An inscription in heavy black handwriting across the bottom of one informed the beholder that these were: "The Right Reverend Sylvanus Breen, D.D., and Wife, photographed from the original oil-paintings executed by Mr. Barton, in 1848." The bishop (who was Grandpa's brother, and a very great man indeed, Letty knew) was represented in his robes and lawn sleeves seated by a balustrade with one hand supporting his forehead in a thoughtful attitude, and the other engaged in turning the leaves of a massy volume propped open on the episcopal knee. In his rear were a Greek temple and a thunderstorm. The lady in the companion picture wore a black velvet gown cut very much off her shoulders, which were extraordinarily large, white, and sloping; she had, furthermore, white ostrich-tips in her hair, a pearl necklace, and a resolute simper. Mrs. Sylvanus looked older than the reverend gentleman, her husband; and, to tell the truth, had a by no means soft or pleasant cast of countenance, pearl necklace, simper, and all.

The couple did not lend themselves readily to dramatization, and Letty took no liberties with them.

She often wished there were more pictures of little girls and boys to tell herself stories about; but she herself was the only new and young thing in the house. In this lonesome pursuit, she had one day asked her mother who was the silhouette hanging on the sitting-room wall, and been assured with something like a laugh that it was no woman, but a man — her own great-grandfather, in point of fact. It had been taken very long ago, oh, very long — nearly a hundred years. He wore his hair that way because it was the fashion for gentlemen in his time. His name was Erasmus Breen, and he had been an Episcopal minister —

“Like Uncle Sylvanus?”

“Yes. Only not a bishop, you know — just a minister.”

Letty eyed the silhouette with a new interest; if that was the way the men dressed, how about the women? Arguing from this, they might well have gone with their hair cut short and pantaloons! The portrait of Bishop Breen’s lady suggested a possible means of finding out. “Where’s Great-grandma’s picture?” she asked in a practical spirit.

“There isn’t any.”

“Didn’t I have any great-grandma?”

“Yes, of course,” said her mother, with a slight shadowy frown. Then she added in her brief, cool voice: “You mustn’t ask so many foolish questions.”

“Then where’s her picture?” persisted the youngster, puzzled and alert. In Letty’s experience, these things always went in pairs. And if her great-grandfather, it was only logical to expect her great-grandmother, too. “I think it’s funny they didn’t have one taken of her, too. Maybe they did, and it’s been lost.”

Her mother went on sewing in silence, with swift, even stitches; she never seemed to make a false move-

ment, her hands darting in and out with a calculated and purposeful rapidity. "I'll ask Grandpa," said Letty, hopefully.

Mrs. Breen looked up. "Letty," she said. She did not raise her voice, but it laid hold of the child like a vice. Raising your voice, for whatever cause, was a dubious proceeding and likely to be unladylike, as Letty had been thoroughly taught. In the Breen household, discipline was enforced with a kind of hard gentleness; and any sort of emotional outburst would have been, Letty felt, the utter offence. "Letty," said Mrs. Breen, then, with a still emphasis, "you mustn't say anything to your grandfather about it. You must never ask him any questions about it. Remember, *never!*"

CHAPTER II

ANYBODY who has the taste, time, and patience for such exercises will find in the "Historical and Genealogical Survey of Charlottesville, New Jersey" — which is an earnest work published by *Harper's* about the middle of the last century — not only a copperplate engraving of the church of Saint Andrew in that city, identical with the one which hung on Mr. Edward Breen's sitting-room wall, but a prodigious long account of its foundation, together with minutely biographical notices of each successive tenant of its pulpit. Some of the information thus collected is not particularly edifying, a circumstance which the author, who is rather given to moral and philosophical reflections, remarks upon with regret. "History —" he says very reasonably — "history, however, must with a devout impartiality hold up her mirror alike to the faults as to the virtues, to the follies as to the wisdom, of her subject . . ." with which sound sentiment he introduces the Reverend Erasmus Breen, somewhat — to be plain — as if the latter's were a case in point.

The one-time pastor of Saint Andrew's was by birth a native of Wales, whence his family emigrated to these colonies while he was "yet at a tender age," the biographer goes on to state, and settled at Charlottesville some while before the Revolution. Young Erasmus got his education and theology at Princeton Seminary, from which stronghold of Presbyterianism he emerged only to be converted to the Episcopalian way of thinking a year or so later. The War coming on, he "primarily espoused the cause of the rebel patriots, serving for two years, 1778–1780, as Chaplain to the 3d Regmt.

New Jersey Line. But the course of events having swayed his views in the opposite direction . . ." the reverend gentleman all at once resigned, and seems to have been an ardent Tory until the close of the struggle, when Toryism went out of fashion and, in fact, out of existence! Was ever any turncoat described in handsomer phrase than the above? But, indeed, the biographer (anonymous, to our serious loss) displays throughout his history of Erasmus an extreme of elegant reticence. "We pass over," he announces tactfully, "the intervening period up to 1796, when Dr. Breen entered upon the pastorate of Saint Andrew's, whose duties he discharged for ten years with a zeal, eloquence, and ability joined to Christian charity and profound scholarship which have rarely been equalled in this pulpit. . . . But that infirmity of resolution and unhappy proneness to fleshly indulgences at which we can but hint, ultimately so gained upon him that (in 1807) he found himself obliged, in the sequel to a distressing domestic scandal, to withdraw from association with this church and eventually from the Episcopal ministry. . . . Later he removed to the then newly established State of Ohio, where he entered on a career of Commerce in which he was eminently successful."

The truth, which can be dimly glimpsed through this and many more pages of smug talk, is that Erasmus Breen, among the numerous mistakes which he made at the outset of his career, made the signal one of choosing the wrong profession, and should never have gone into the priesthood at all; he lived hard, drank like a fish, and was of a most violent, capricious, and unstable temper, for all his undoubted intelligence and capacity. During his tenure of Saint Andrew's he married a young woman of the parish; and they had lived together some years and had three children when the wretched affair took place to which Erasmus's biographer has so discreetly referred in the last paragraph. Whether the

charges the minister brought against his wife were just or not, in these cases the woman almost always pays. In after years, even at the time little Letty Breen came on the stage, when the story was getting on towards a century old and might well have been forgot, the merest mention of their unlucky female ancestor was still sure to start a ghastly rattling of bones in the family closet. The upshot of the whole malodorous business was a separation; Erasmus went West with the children, and never saw his wife again, although, let it be known to his credit, he provided for her generously, so that she might live in comfort to the end of her days. These outlasted his own by many years; the woman lived to be nearly ninety, in a severe retirement; and of the third generation of Breens, not one knew her name or more than the bare outlines of her miserable story.

By the time Erasmus came to die, — towards 1835, that is, — his family were grown, being, in the order of their ages, Sylvanus, Edward, and one daughter, Helen. He left them well provided for, for whatever the ex-clergyman's mistakes or misfortunes, he was undeniably an able man. The daughter, who had been brought up by some of the Breen relatives in Charlottesville, turned out a fine, dashing, handsome girl, — they were all handsome, — and at twenty-one or two married a young military attaché at the German Legation in Washington (during Monroe's administration), whom she met at Saratoga Springs. Thereafter Mrs. Von Donhoff lived up and down the world, seeing a good deal of it, and acquiring many habits of speech and mind quite alien to the honest and simple land of her birth; but somehow the brothers and sister, though widely separated often for long stretches of time, never lost touch with one another or became estranged. They were attached equally to their kin and to that fly-blown old name of Breen, of which, for no conceivable reason, they were all inordinately proud. Sylvanus did his share towards illumi-

nating it by entering the ministry, like his father before him; but the younger man was of the stronger fibre, morally; there was never a cloud on Sylvanus's reputation. He led the most temperate of lives, preached, exhorted, pounded the pulpit cushions in the contest with Satan so consistently and to such good purpose that he ended by gaining as a prize the hand and heart of Miss Charlotte Riggins of Buffalo, who was a daughter of the Riggins's Snowflake Starch concern, and heiress to a handsome fortune for those days. Miss Riggins was already past her first youth at this time, and never had been pretty; she must have cut a grim figure among the gay, good-looking Breens. But she was a conscientious and sternly sensible woman, devoted to the church and to her husband; nobody could deny that Sylvanus made a good choice. Not long afterwards, the divine—being a man of imposing presence, with a great, round, oratorical voice, who would grace the position well and could, moreover, afford to keep it up in a suitable state—was advanced to be Bishop of the Southern Diocese of the State, the Right Reverend Sylvanus Breen, D.D., and lived happily ever after. He was an honor to the name, and a personage to whom all the Breens all over the country pointed with pride; the family was pretty widely scattered by now throughout New Jersey and Ohio and many other states, old Erasmus himself having been one of a numerous and prolific brood.

The other brother, Edward Breen, in his youth studied law, and was admitted to the bar; but, coming into his inheritance about that time, it does not appear that he ever practised his profession or did a stroke of work of any kind thereafter, and throughout his long life. He spent his money in various graceful and always gentlemanly ways, naïvely expecting it to last forever; and, in fact, it was astonishing how long it did last! We have all had opportunities for observing phenomena of this nature. It would seem to take an absolute genius

for wasting to "get through" a decent property all at once; comparatively few of us reach the poorhouse, and after years of laziness and folly and extravagance there is almost always a little something left to bury a man with in the end! Edward married into another stately family, a Miss Letitia Parrish of Virginia, who herself inherited a small estate; they had three boys, lived in great splendor for a while, then in less splendor, then in merely ordinary comfort, then at last in a desperate struggle to keep up appearances. Time and again the bishop gave them a lift; time and again the Parrish relatives lent a helping hand. But there came a day when Mrs. Sylvanus, who ruled her affairs and her bishop with a strong hand, peremptorily intimated that patience had ceased to be a virtue; and his wife's death cut Edward off from their other source of supplies. We might as well "pass over this period" as did the Reverend Erasmus's biographer; it is a sorry tale, a familiar tale. Those who may have supposed that there was some exciting mystery about old Edward Breen's secluded life in his tumble-down home may disabuse their minds of the idea; there was no mystery whatever — nothing but the mean tragedy of broken fortunes and a pinched old age. The Muskingum Street house was the last tag-end of Edward's patrimony; his sons were grown and departed on their several ways; his friends outlived. There the old man lived in a kind of resentful solitude, given to terrifically cynical philosophizing on the way of the world, the fetich of Success, the pettiness of human aspirations, the fickleness of fortune, etc.; and, in short, putting as dignified a face as he could on the circumstances.

He used to write long, ponderous letters on these and kindred topics to his brother, Bishop Sylvanus, not considering his son's wife, who kept his house, quite up to such discussions. "I do not find Harry's wife particularly congenial —" he once wrote — "she seems to be

so absorbed in her domestic duties as to have no time for intellectual recreation. Never have I seen such ardent and tireless industry; it is, of course, very creditable in the circumstances, and I know she wants to recompense me in some sort for offering her this home, by being as useful as she can. But there is no feeling of repose in her society. I doubt if her sensibilities are very keen; for instance, she never mentions poor Harry! To be sure, I can understand that kind of reticence. The world is too full of suffering for us to darken it further by dwelling eternally on our own losses and distresses. I myself do not want to see unpleasant things, nor to talk about unhappy events. Still, it would be natural for Martha to refer to him once in a while. As it is, I sometimes actually wonder if the little girl knows she ever had a father! She has been named after my wife, Letitia; a quiet child, thin and undersized, very large black eyes. Although homely, there is a fugitive look of our family about her; I cannot exactly place it, but she doesn't at all resemble her mother. Martha's family, as you may or may not know, were plain, solid, respectable people from somewhere up in the state; Harry met her at Gambier. She has no friends here, not seeming to possess much of a social gift; and, to be plain, my dear Syl, in the present posture of my affairs, it would not be possible for us to see much of society. I do not wish to impose on the most generous of brothers, and you know if the world had treated me as well as it has yourself, I should never need to approach you in this sordid manner. But without a little financial assistance, I scarce know how I can tide over this coming six months. . . ."

The letters generally wound up with some such request, couched in the most delicate language; Sylvanus was used to it, and always responded freely, unless his wife intervened. Mrs. Charlotte hadn't much opinion of her brother-in-law, and Edward knew it. "It is

sad and strange," he wrote, "that the female sex should be incapable of appreciating the beautiful and disinterested affection existing between men — between brothers, such as you and I, my dear Sylvanus. For that reason, I may suggest that you say nothing to dear Charlotte about your last loan; it might give rise to some unhappy family *jar*. Alas, I am sensible that I have trespassed on your liberality too often; but, had I had a fair start in life, and a little good luck during my active years, my purse would always be as open as yours to the less fortunate of my kindred, . . ." which was quite true, for as long as his own wants were satisfied first, old Breen did not care how much anybody else took; he was of a most amiable and unselfish disposition.

This letter-writing was the main occupation of Edward's life; it seemed to the child Letty as if she was forever being enjoined to go gently about the house, or take herself and her restlessness outdoors, so as not to disturb Grandpa at his writing. The pigeonholes of the old desk in the hall were crammed with Mr. Breen's correspondence, since he kept all the letters he received and made careful copies of his own replies. He had them all tied up in neat bundles and docketed: "Letters from sister Helen from Washington, D.C., 1850-'53; from London, Eng., May-November, 1862; from Rome, 1862-1863." "Letter from sister Helen in regard to Colonel Von Donhoff's death, June 12, 1871." Letty knew the outside of that one which had a great black border and seal, and looked very ominous and mournful. There were besides: "Letters from my son Thomas concerning Nevada silver-mining stock; my reply thereto." "Letter from my son T. B. concerning irrigation project in Big-Foot Valley, Arizona; and my reply." "Letter from my son Thomas concerning investment in Pine Notch & Tennesaw Railroad shares; and my answer." There was not far short of a bale of these last, representing more or less accurately the busi-

ness activities of Thomas Breen for fifteen or twenty years, of an astounding variety and splendor. Thomas was always engaged in some vast project, and his letters dealt with sums never less than a million. Perhaps that was where some of those oft-solicited loans from Bishop Breen went; for there were packages of scrip and stock and richly engraved documents entitling the holder to all kinds of profits in half a score of different mines, railroads, oil-wells, who knows what, stowed away in those same mahogany drawers. Poor old Edward cherished the hope of repairing his fortunes with some of this rainbow gold; it was a way that strongly attracted him.

Among these interesting papers, Letty herself remembered with perfect distinctness — for she was eight or nine years old at the time — the arrival and reception of one which was destined to be catalogued: "Letter from my son William in relation to his marriage," — an event which the youngster gathered was for some reason not particularly agreeable to the elder Breen. That gentleman expressed himself with a good deal of freedom in "Letter to brother Sylvanus respecting W's marriage; *copy*." "I had no desire to direct William's choice, but I should have wished it to fall upon some young woman who moved in our own sphere. Miss Hudnut is the daughter of the landlady where Will boards — very decent people, I have no doubt, but it is hardly a suitable match for a Breen. However, of course, there is nothing for it but to accept it gracefully. I wrote the prospective bride a civil note; to which she replied in a rather high-flown and gushing strain, addressing me as '*Dearest and noblest Parent-to-be!*' I see your smile; but if you had ever had children of your own, my dear Syl, you would realize that it is not altogether a smiling matter. . . . The young couple will be obliged to set up their house in a very modest manner, as William's salary is small; he still continues with the R. & N. R'lw'y, in their Cincinnati office."

To an impartial observer it would seem as if the unwelcome Miss Hudnut had not gained much by graduating into the Breen "sphere." But old Edward was conscious of no inconsistencies in his own attitude; to the end of his life he believed that his father was one of the strongest characters as well as one of the brightest minds of his time; that his mother was — ahem! — a sad mistake of the kind which are frequently to be met with in the annals of all great families; that he himself had been the victim of an unkind and unjust fate throughout his career; and that the name of Breen represented the only true aristocracy of the country!

CHAPTER III

THERE stood — or reclined, for it was all but falling down — in a corner of the Breen yard, remote from the house, and propped against the stone wall, a ramshackle wooden pagoda which the little girl, Letty, used for a playhouse. It was octagonal in shape, built of trellis-work, with a pointed roof, the whole covered with a wild growth of grape-vines ; inside there was a floor of bricks and a rotten old bench around the walls ; and in the old days the founders of the house had probably been used to come here of a summer evening, and smoke a pipe and watch the moon rise over the river and the meadows at the foot of Muskingum Street, in great content and simplicity. The place figured in Letty's solitary play in every rôle from wigwam to palace ; and it was here that befell her what might be called in the taste of to-day the Adventure of the Freckled Boy. For, coming there one day with a volume of "The Last Days of Pompeii," — which was the sort of reading her grandfather's library chiefly afforded, — and having arrived at a highly interesting part of that classic, namely, where *Ione* visits in the house of *Arbaces the Egyptian*, she was most annoyingly interrupted, first, by a succession of small objects like pebbles or acorns falling upon her page or striking and bounding off, and then by a species of bright, watery shadow wierdly dancing up and down and across the print and making it difficult to read that accurate and richly-colored piece of description. Letty looked up and around without seeing anything, went back to the book, and on the instant the spot of light began again to gyrate before her eyes with a hobgoblin vivacity. She changed her position ; the thing followed,

persistently. Letty's perplexity was fast giving way to real alarm, when the mysterious agency spoke from somewhere above her head, in a diplomatically gentle voice. "Aw, don't be scairt!" it said ingratiatingly.

Letty looked up again, and this time beheld, framed in one of the holes of the roof, the boy's round head in a disordered halo of rough red hair, and his round freckled face good-naturedly grinning down at her. She stared speechlessly; she had never been spoken to before by a boy in her whole life. This one did not seem particularly formidable. "Don't be scairt," he repeated, rather anxiously; "I ain't goin' fer to hurt you, you know."

"How did you get up there?" said Letty, recovering a little.

"Clumb," said the boy, succinctly; then he added: "I'm standin' on the top of yer wall on my tipty-toes, and layin' up agin the roof. I done that light business with a piece o' lookin'-glass. See?" And, producing this implement, he made the sunshine slip and flicker over the interior of the little temple as before. Letty's gaze followed it and returned to him in still unappeased wonder.

"What did you want to do it for?" she demanded.

"Oh, jest fer greens. Jest 'cuz I — I jest thunk I would," said the boy, not without a faint embarrassment. He hitched a ragged leg into view, and dropped one bare brown foot with a dismally soiled bandage around the heel over the edge of the opening. "I guess I'll come down an' — an' see you," he announced tentatively, swinging the foot to and fro while he surveyed her; he had quick, hard, light blue eyes, and his look contrived to be at once bold and shy. At this move, however, all the edicts of her elders forbidding any sort of commerce with the street children crowded into Letty's mind at one rush, and along with them a certain formless repugnance on her own part. Little girls are by nature undemocratic; it is lamentably easy to teach

them snobbery. If Letty had been capable of putting her feeling into words, she would have said this boy was dirty and coarse and not of her class; she was not old Edward Breen's granddaughter for nothing.

"You shan't! You can't come down! My grandpa doesn't want you on his place! He *said* so! You can't come!" she proclaimed shrilly and heatedly; "my grandpa won't *let* you!"

"Huh!" snarled the boy, with a sudden and startling change of demeanor. Fire sprang in his blue eyes; he flushed darkly through all his tan and freckles. "Huh! Don't want me? S'pose he don't? S'pose *I* care fer *him* — dern old rip! Won't *let* me, hey?" he inquired with a ferocious satire; "less see him *stop* me, that's all! I guess I'll go w'ere I wanta, 'thout askin' *him*! *There!*" He swung the other leg over. "Won't *let* me, huh?" He calculated the distance, gathered himself together for the spring, and landed in the middle of the floor with a thump and a light rain of dust and particles of rotten wood that set them both sneezing. "*Atc-choo! There!*" repeated the boy, wiped his face on the sleeve of his torn blue shirt, and looked at Letty defiantly.

As for that young lady, instead of shrieking and flying to the house to report this act of piracy, she stood still, shrinking a little, but fascinated. She was overcome by an entirely feminine admiration for this terrific, fearless, daredevil boy. Of what avail were rules and regulations against such as he? She did not forget the dirt and the coarseness and the difference of caste; but those facts no longer appeared of any importance! She began to argue inwardly that she had done all *she* could to obey orders; but she could not *make* him go — she could not *make* him stop talking to her, now could she? Nevertheless she threw a sop to her conscience by announcing, "I guess I'd better go back to the house," and taking a half-hearted step or two in that direction,

— behavior which wrought an extraordinary consternation in the boy's mind.

"Oh, say!" he began contritely; "you ain't mad, are you? Say, don't go 'way. I — I didn't mean nothin' — I didn't go fer to cuss yer gran'paw in dead earnest, you know. I was jest talkin' and I kinder fergot. I — I was kinder riled fer a minute — but I didn't mean nothin', honest, I didn't. Say, don't go 'way. You ain't mad, are you?" He pleaded with an abject humility; coming after his late display of strength and violence, it was the subtlest sort of flattery. Letty felt that, in sheer humanity, she must overlook his evil-doing.

"Oh, I'm not mad," she assured him graciously; and then added, honestly enough, "only I don't see what you wanted to come here for, if you knew Grandpa didn't *let* anybody."

"Huh! I ain't afraid o' *him!*" growled the boy, darkening again. He paused. "I don't keer nothin' 'bout — 'bout *anythin'*," he blurted out, looking away from her; "s' long's *you* ain't mad!"

Sudden illumination descended upon Letty; the boy — as she phrased it to herself — thought she was nice! Moreover, it was abundantly evident that whatever she said or did, the boy would helplessly keep on thinking that she was nice. Simultaneously there arose within her a desire to experiment on him.

"I guess I'd better go on back to the house now," she repeated, moving off once more.

"Oh, say, don't!" urged the boy, with gratifying ardor; "say, come on over here, and set down. I — I got somethin' to show you. Say, jest stay a *minute*, won't you?"

"Oh, I can't."

"Can't, why not?"

"Because. They — they wouldn't like me to at the house, you know," recited Letty, again to the somewhat feeble approval of her conscience.

"Why, they don't any of 'em know you're here, do they?"

"No, but —"

"Ho, what's the differ, then? 'Tain't hurtin' *them*, anyway. You got a good right to come here if you want, and they ain't nobody can stop me, if *I* want," declared the boy, arrogantly. "Leastways, *you* can't, so you might just's well stay's not. Come on over here, and lemme show you. It's right in that corner."

"Is — is it something nice?" queried Letty, conceding a step towards him. His arguments, she felt, were just, and, besides, she had held out long enough.

"Yes, awf'ly nice. Come on."

"Well, then, here I am; now show it to me, whatever it is," said Letty, in abrupt recklessness. She settled herself in the corner, looking all around: "I don't see anything. Where is it? What you were going to show me, I mean."

"'Tain't anywhere," said the boy, with a shameless grin. "I jest said that to git you to stay!"

"Why, the *idea*! I should think you'd be ashamed! I'm going right off!"

"No, you ain't!" said the boy, masterfully. He caught her hand in his own strong little grimy paw, as she started up. "You jest *gotter* stay now. I'll hold you."

"Oh, ouch! Let me go!"

"Shucks, I didn't hurt you, did I, Letty?"

"How did you know my name?" said Letty, surprised, and, perhaps, not altogether sorry of an excuse to abandon the other topic, and the struggle altogether.

"Why, I seen you before — lots of times, at the house. You know me, too, don't you?"

"No, I don't," said Letty, genuinely taken aback. "I'm sure I've never seen *you* before."

The boy looked faintly disappointed. "Why, you have so," he protested. "'T least, you didn't look at

me much, but I thought you *saw* me jest the same, kinder 'thout lookin' — that way girls kin do," he explained, displaying an unexpected acuteness; "say, honest, *didn't* you? Them times I've come with Maw when she's took yer wash, don't you remember?"

"Oh — oh, Mrs. *Hatfield*! Is she your mother?" said Letty; distaste possessed her anew. The figure of Mrs. Hatfield, tall, strong, and raw-boned, with her coarse, straight hair strained away from her face and wrapped around a little black comb at the back of her head, with her sparse, discolored teeth, with her stringy bare arms, with her dingy calico waist and skirt forever yawning apart in the rear — Mrs. Hatfield hanging out clothes and scrubbing the floor, or sprawled over the kitchen table drinking tea with 'Lizbeth Hurd and plying a knife vigorously among the fried onions, — these successive images defiled before Letty's mind with a singular effect of disillusionment. Yet from some ill-defined motive, call it kindness of heart, call it calculation, call it mere civility, call it what you choose, — it probably was a little of all three, — her manner towards her companion betrayed no change.

"Is *she* your mother? I've often seen *her*," said Letty.

"Naw, she ain't exactly my mother — not my *own*, you know. She's my stepmother — Pap's second. Pap, he works in the fact'ry," said the slum lad, simply, conscious of nothing untoward in this disclosure. "My name's Jim. You call me that, will you?"

"I don't believe they'd let me," said Letty, turning for a kind of refuge and bulwark to the very tyranny under which she lived; "they don't let me talk to any boys, you know."

"I don't mean right out before 'em," said Jim, impatiently; "I mean when — when we're together like this. When you come here, you know. I knew they wa'n't no way fer me to git to talk to you, 'cep'n' this. Say, you come on and be here to-morry, won't you?"

The little girl hesitated ; she did not know whether she wanted to see him again or not ; she did not feel like running any risks for him, and yet — In fact, she was the same inconceivable mixture of caution and daring as the rest of her sex ; but it was really the intrigue itself that attracted her, not the personality of its hero. In the end there occurred to her the safe, easy, and eminently feminine expedient of promising everything first, and making up her mind about it afterwards. "All right," she agreed.

Miss Letty Breen was, at this date, perhaps twelve years old, of a perfectly flat and straight figure, with her hair in pigtails, a gingham pinafore, and brass toes to her boots ; the young gentleman may have been a year or so her senior, had a very limited acquaintance with the English Grammar, and a sovereign indifference to dress and deportment generally. Yet, in defiance of these externals, and contrary to all romantic precedent, the adventure thus begun thrived and prospered sturdily. Those who fancy they observe an unnatural and unpleasing precocity in the pair are recommended to review Proverbs ix. 17 (a publication which, of course, we always keep conveniently to hand), and to consider that children are but abbreviated men and women, and that the difference between seven and seventy is only a difference of degrees of knowledge when all is said — hardly at all of desires and impulses.

As Letty's pavilion was within sight and hearing of the house, — though connected with it by a devious path through tangles of neglected shrubbery which nobody ever explored, — and as the little girl was under a pretty close discipline as to hours and movements, it is astonishing that this Romeo-and-Juliet association remained so long undiscovered. It lasted for weeks. In unguarded moments, as their confidence grew, the children would be quite loud in their play — still they escaped. The street was noisy with children already,

and Letty so quiet and subdued ordinarily that no one in the household distinguished her amongst the common din. Of the two, it was the girl who brought to their companionship by far the keener sense of guilt and secrecy; the boy, whose home was to him as its lair is to the wolf, offering little in the way of either comforts or restrictions, was concerned to keep their meetings private mainly on Letty's account, and only in a secondary and very slight degree for his own. "If they caught me, they couldn't do no more'n lam me good, and I've stood plenty lammin's — one more wouldn't finish me, I reckon," he remarked philosophically; "but I wouldn't want 'em to lam *you*. Yer gran'paw er yer maw wouldn't, 'less'n they was drunk, would they? They don't ingin'rally to girls. If they're drunk, you got to keep out'n their way, anyhow — they'd lick you fer goin' to Sunday-school if they couldn't think of nothin' else! What *would* they do to you, anyways?"

Letty did not know. Some desire to impress him moved her to obscure hints about dungeons and bread-and-water, which, however, she found him very slow to understand. His reading of romances had been confined to a work entitled "Sure-shot Sam, the Bandit King of the Rockies," and his acquaintance with dungeons to the time Pap got sent up for thirty days for busting the glass over the bar and starting a free-for-all in Jake Finnegan's place. "That's a piece of it," he said, exhibiting the fragment with which he had wrought the magic on the day of their first meeting; "Pap, he jest knocked it all to flinders," he told her, not without pride. He gave this prize to Letty. He bestowed on her all sorts of queer boyish treasures, a necklace of buckeyes, a mussel-shell, lined with iridescent purple, picked up at some fish-stall, a large blue butterfly skewered to a bit of pasteboard and, since it had not been cured according to the formulas, smelling to heaven — trash which Letty smuggled to the house and hid in a corner of the garret.

In her heart the youngster did not value them ; they were merely part of the mystery and the excitement, and symbols of a devotion which was all the more gratifying, because, as Letty somehow dimly perceived, her boyish lover was by nature rather hard, self-contained, and unemotional. The same spirit of complacence kept her listening to his talk, agreeing with and admiring him ; her gentle sham interest caressed the lad infinitely ; she was as different as possible from the fierce, independent, loud-mouthed little squaws of his street. And if her behavior was all one piece of hypocrisy, at least Letty did not know it.

Young Mr. Hatfield, never before having had so sympathetic an audience, talked very freely and at wearisome length about himself and his exploits and his intentions, with no more brag or swagger, however, than most boys. His father, who was an extremely powerful and dangerous person, had lived with his family in West Virginny, where the elder Hatfield worked in the coal-mines ; Jim remembered this time, and gave eerie reports of descents into the shaft and black underground passages. Then, on account of "Pap gittin' inter a — a fuss with a man named McCoy," as Jim explained with sufficient vagueness, they had moved here, where his father had a job 'tending boiler in the furnace room of the soap factory. They lived in two rooms in the tenement on the corner of Second Street, near where the old "Y" bridge came in, and there were five of the children, all younger than himself ; the kids were all right and Pap was all right, but Jim did not like his step-mother. The family across the hall from them had a kid that couldn't walk very good ; there was something the matter with her legs, somehow, and she had to set in a rocking-chair all the time with a quilt over 'em, because they were all kind of twisted up, you know ; or else be carried about like a baby. He often carried her ; Ida (her name was Ida) was a little mite, and he was strong as

strong. Yes, she could get around some on the floor, but she went sideways, sort of jerky; once he licked a boy for laughing at the way Ida tried to walk. When he grew up, he was going to have her cured. Ida was real pretty in the face, and as smart as could be, if she did have to set in a chair. He talked so much about her that Letty privately decided Ida was exceedingly tiresome. Jim's other plans involved the making of vast sums of money clearing snow off of sidewalks, running errands, and selling papers, all enterprises in which he had already been profitably engaged in his by-hours, after school. He had saved up a dollar and seventy-three cents, and he was going to buy a boot-blackening outfit when he got enough. There was big money in that; and no trick at all to learn how. Only he wasn't going to be a boot-black always, you bet; he was going to be a conductor on a train, or maybe captain of a steamboat, he had not yet fully made up his mind which; which would she like best?

"I think the steamboat," Letty decided after some pondering.

"All right, then. When I am, we'll get married," said the boy, abruptly, and changing color a little, yet bringing the words out with that rough decision which always so impressed Letty. But this announcement startled her out of her usual amiably acquiescent pose.

"Why, I — I —" she stammered; "I don't believe you — you ought to say that — to talk that way, you know —"

"Why, wouldn't you — wouldn't you like it, Letty? I'd like first-rate to — to take care of you —" said the boy, gulping and stumbling, hampered by the want of words to express his thought, yet desperately in earnest. He tried to look into her averted eyes. "I — I *want* to, you know. I wisht I could show you — I wisht I could do somethin' for you. I wisht a great big tagger would come rip-roarin' out the bushes this minute — I'd

show you. I wouldn't let him touch you. I'd run him right off lickety-split — or else he'd have to eat me first !”

Letty, to whom this picturesque suggestion forcibly appealed, looked at the bushes almost with a shudder ; for a moment it did seem to her as if they moved, to her terrified delight — if, somehow, it *could* be the tiger ! That would crown the romance !

“I think we'd have a bully old time if we was married,” said Jim ; and after a moment's silence, he added huskily, “Say, Letty, you know all the time we've been — been goin' tergether, we ain't never — I ain't never —”

“Ever what ?”

“*You* know,” said the boy, digging his heel nervously into the loose brown mould. He darted a quick glance at her ; all his roughness had dropped from him like a garment, leaving him helplessly shy and wistful. “You're jest as *pretty* — I ain't ever seen any girl so *pretty* —” he murmured — “I — I want — *you* know !”

“No, I don't. I don't know what you're talking about !” declared Letty — than whom nobody could possibly have known better.

“Well, all right, I'll *say* it then !” said Jim, suddenly bold again. “We ain't ever kis —”

“Don't ! You — you — you *can't* — you *mustn't* — !”

“Why, why not, Letty ? *Everybody* does that's — that's like us. They always kiss each other — you *know* they do,” persisted the boy ; “*please*, Letty — !” He was really in the tremulous state of modesty which might have been expected of his companion ; but Letty, in fact, remained, sentimentally at least, utterly unmoved. She was conscious only of a certain fear and a certain curiosity. And at this interesting juncture there stalked out of the shrubbery and confronted them, not a tagger — no such luck ! — but 'Lizabeth Hurd, erect

and saturnine, her lips pinched together, her eyes shocked and severe, personified Doom in brown-and-white specked calico skirts.

The hero and heroine sprang apart as if a bolt from heaven had struck betwixt their hands; they stood before her tongue-tied, Letty in genuine fright, the boy divided between anger at being caught at all and mortification at being caught in what he felt to be a sickeningly foolish position. He was much more afraid of being laughed at than of being caned. But 'Lizbeth had no thought of laughter; she was not so facilely amused; instead, she unwittingly invested the situation with a kind of dignity, and strengthened the children in their own conceit by taking them so seriously. "*Well!*" she ejaculated; her glance travelled scorchingly over both of them, and rested on Letty at last from the heights of outraged decency. "*Well, miss! So this is how you've ben putting in the day!*"

Letty began to cry. "I—I couldn't help it—he *m-made* me!" she whimpered.

"Ain't you ever been told not to have nothin' to do with them Second Street children?" pursued 'Lizbeth, inflexibly; "ain't you 'shamed of yerself?"

Jim found voice all at once; the ready savagery of the street returned to him. "Aw, g'wan! It's none of your business what she does!" he said truculently, thrusting out a contemptuous under jaw; "you ain't her folks!"

"What do you s'pose yer gran'paw'll say?" said 'Lizbeth, seeing the point of this remark, but loftily ignoring the speaker. "What do you s'pose yer mama'll say?"

"They won't have a chance to say nothin', with *you* erroun'," said Jim, neatly; "don't you mind her, Letty. She can't hurt you. Don't you mind any old hired girl!"

"I'll 'tend to *you* d'reckly, my lad," said 'Lizbeth,

darkly ; "Letty, you go on in the house. I'm coming in in a minute and tell yer gran'paw what kind of a little girl you've ben. You go on, now !"

"Aw, let her tell, don't *you* care ! You ain't ben doin' nothin', 'n' she can't say you have," shrilled the boy ; "don't you go 'less'n you wanta, Letty. You don't have to take nothin' off'n *her*." It gave him a real pang to see his poor little lady-love go tremulously up the path, sobbing in terror and misery, although he frankly believed she overestimated the trouble. He was used to clashes with authority, and without much fear of them. Master Jim could wield a pretty sharp tongue on his own side, and was getting too sizable a boy to be whipped. And, though his own experience with older people associated them mainly with blows and hard language, he had seen enough of Letty to suspect that her world was different. That old man with the white hair and the clean shirt, Mr. Breen, did not look as if he would ever take a strap to any of his household, not even to his granddaughter, thought the boy ; he had the melancholy shrewdness of his upbringing.

"That's enough, young man. I don't want to hear any more of your smartness," 'Lizabeth said, eying him with huge severity. Then she discharged a sharp question, "Ain't you Mrs. Hatfield's boy ?"

"Huh ! What'll you gimme fer tellin' ?" Jim inquired pertly, skipping with wary skips just within her reach, and just out again. But 'Lizabeth made no effort to capture him ; she knew better.

"That's all right — I *thought* you were the Hatfield boy," she said serenely ; "you take yerself off now, and be lively about it. I guess you won't be so brash comin' round here, after I've told Mr. Breen 'n' yer maw. That'll be the last wash she'll do here, I guess. Never *you* mind ; you're goin' to git your hide tanned fer you all right !" And with this dire prophecy, she walked off, without even looking back to see that she was

obeyed, smiling a grimly satisfied smile at the sudden cloud on the young gentleman's countenance. The skipping and jeering abruptly ceased ; his stepmother's job, the wash ! Golly ! He hadn't thought about that !

CHAPTER IV

'LIZBETH, either because she was busy, or because the others were busy, — old Mr. Breen being profoundly engaged with his writing at the moment, — or because the breach of law was really not so awful and unforgivable in her view as the frightened child believed, or because of some theory that the suspense and uncertainty would be good for Letty, or from whatever reason, in short, did not at once hand in her damaging report. She retired to her pots and pans in a grisly silence ; and Letty, making herself small in corners and behaving with the servile good manners of all children in like case, had begun to wonder if it could be possible that 'Lizbeth had forgot her, or was going to let her off, or whether she might not be preparing some unimaginable form of accusation, when something came to pass which sent the late affair temporarily out of 'Lizbeth's head, and even out of Letty's ; something which startled the entire Breen household from its monotony, and aroused the whole of that end of Muskingum Street. That is to say, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, there drove up to Letty's postern-gate and halted there with a great racket and jingling, one of the antique hacks from the depot with a sole-leather trunk — in a kind of loose jacket or shroud of dirty white canvas such as people used to clothe their trunks withal, in those days, thirty years ago — and a sole-leather valise crowded into the driver's seat ; and, appearing at the window, the head and face of a plump, high-complexioned lady with her black hair in water-waves, a fashionable little bonnet, and a black lace veil drawn across just under the nose. Nothing of the kind

had ever been known to happen to the Breens before; children galloped to the spot from all directions, and every casement in the vicinity bloomed with heads.

"Is this the place?" cried the lady out of the window to her hackman.

"I guess so — I ain't ever druv anybody here before. This Mr. Breen's, sonny?" said the hackman, addressing a freckled and red-headed lad near by — Mr. James Hatfield, in fact, who, having spent most of his time recently in prowling about the premises, was naturally one of the first arrivals on this scene.

"Mr. *Edward* Breen's?" added the lady, leaning out and fixing him with a pair of large black eyes, a little too full in the ball, under her black brows and rather scant lashes.

"There ain't but the one Breens in town — I know that," said the hackman, as the boy nodded; "run along in, bub, and git somebody to handle the trunk."

"Wait a minute, boy!" the lady cried out, in a loud, high, and strong voice, which was, however, not exactly unpleasant; and she stepped briskly down from the vehicle, shook out her furbelowed skirts and bustle, and glanced around alertly. If she noticed the interest of the neighborhood, she gave no sign of it; she had the air of being used to crowds and staring. "You can take my little bag as you go," she announced to the youngster in a graciously imperious manner, and waving him to that article, which, by the way, being about half the size of the trunk and of a very substantial build, scarcely answered her description. All the children circled about with eyes of awe on the glorious vision: the stranger rustled with trimmings and feathers; she chinked with beads, chains, and bangles; she exhaled perfume of an Oriental richness. It was impossible to resist so magnificent a presence; and Jim, knowing that the act was, in some sort, a direct tempting of Providence against both himself and Letty, nevertheless ad-

vanced, and took the valise and staggered with it up the steps, wordlessly, like one under a spell! "Get one of these children to hold your horses while you carry my trunk in," he heard her say next, in her style of agreeable command, to the driver. And after thumping the "little bag" down in the porch to the astonishment of the family there assembled, and proclaiming, "There's somebody coming!" he returned just in time to encounter the hackman hoisting the trunk along, in a state of obedience similar to his own. The lady came behind; she was too solidly made to climb with ease, and breathed hard at the top of the stair, but the delicate brilliancy of her cheeks did not alter. "Somebody coming?" repeated Mr. Breen, as the boy vanished; he stared at the valise. "Somebody coming, did he say? But where did that boy come from himself? What under heaven —? There must be some mistake —" and the procession at that moment filing into view around the end of the house, the old gentleman got halfway to his feet with an exclamation. "Helen!" he said loud, clutching at the arms of his chair and trembling a little; he was an old man and very much startled.

"Well, Edward!" said his sister, serenely. She tripped forward, and bestowed a couple of light pecks on either of his cheeks, an affectionate greeting which old Edward, still in a maze of surprise, returned mechanically. He flutteringly and half involuntarily moved a hand to feel whether his collar and stock were in place; he was too much taken aback at this sudden apparition to be sure that he was pleased. The brother and sister had not met for ten years; and perhaps the first thought of both was not of the changes in the other's appearance, but of the changes in their own. There was not a great difference of age between them, and they still looked alike, in spite of Mrs. Von Donhoff's extra flesh and the artificial vivacity of her movements. For, upon a close inspection, it became mournfully apparent that with her

little bonnet, high-heeled boots, smart black veil, water-waves, complexion and all, Mrs. Helen was no longer even a middle-aged woman; wherever middle age may be placed, she had got past it. She stood off, holding her brother's hands and still talking.

"Why, how surprised you are to see me! Didn't you get my letter? It did seem to me a little odd that there wasn't anybody at the station to meet me, but there! I'm an old campaigner — I can manage very well by myself; I knew you knew that. But you never got my letter? No? How provoking! Never mind — here I am! *J'y suis, j'y reste!* There won't be any ceremonies on my account, I hope. I suppose you can tuck me in some corner, eh?" She began to take off her gloves as she said this, her swift eyes itemizing, yet without offensive curiosity, all the picture before her: the decaying house; her brother's worn figure; Letty's mother with her tired, reserved face; 'Lizabeth Hurd agape in a distant doorway. That rapid search-light even swept over Jim as he executed an obscure signal in Letty's direction, to the ghastly discomfiture of both children. But Mrs. Von Donhoff's gaze moved on unchecked.

"Why, why — I — why, of course —" Mr. Breen stammered, still bewildered, but recovering somewhat. He had been looking at his sister almost blankly, but now began to smile. "Really, Helen—" he said with a fine grace, "you must pardon me, my dear. I'm all abroad, as the sailors say. We hadn't any idea — I thought you were in Nice — but, of course, we're only too glad —" he took her hand with warmth, and, half-laughing, made her a splendid bow in the style of his youth, and kissed her. These forgotten flourishes sat well on old Edward, who performed them with naturalness and dignity. "Helen," he said in a tone of emphatic conviction, "I'll have to say it — I *never* saw anybody look as young as you do. Absolutely I can't

believe it. At your age — ! Nobody would say you were a day over fifty, and as for being sev — ”

“La, la, la, then don’t *you* say it !” interrupted the lady, sharp but good-humored ; “you can’t complain of Papa Time, either, Edward. I believe we all hold our looks very well in this family.” And after this speech, which may be considered a masterpiece of tact, since old Helen’s inner judgment was that her brother looked like Methuselah, she turned to the rest of the family. “Is this my little niece, Harry’s wife ? — poor dear Harry !” she interlined with a sigh. “How do you do, my dear ? It’s queer our meeting this way after you’ve been in the family ten years — or is it longer ? But you know we’d have met before if I’d been in the country. Of course you understand this surprise wasn’t intentional. I don’t like surprises myself ; I don’t think it’s good style to surprise people. I wrote from New York, but the letter doesn’t seem to have reached you. And who is this little miss ? Come here and kiss me ; don’t you know anything about your Aunt Helen ? Well, I’m glad to be in one house where there’s a child ! I never had one myself, you know,” said Mrs. Helen, in a tone of suppressed feeling.

The younger woman went up and gave her a cool hand, and said some words of greeting in a pleasant, cool voice. Perhaps she found the visitor’s animation rather an exotic trait for a member of the Breen family, who were not given to shrugs and exclamation points. But Mrs. Von Donhoff had lived more than half her life among foreign peoples and might be supposed to have picked up some of their manners. At any rate, she met this reception without loss of countenance ; she was undauntedly kind, gracious, and affectionate, even with Mrs. Harry Breen. She patted and petted Letty, beamed on ’Lizbeth, and thanked the hackman with a careful civility. “Give him a dollar, will you, Edward ? Eh ? Oh, it’s a dollar and a half ? I always forget

those things — I haven't any head for figures — can't count, really — ” and while Mr. Breen fumbled in his lean pockets for the sum, she recollected her other porter. Young Hatfield had been on the point of sneaking off without putting in any claim. To save his life the boy could not have told why he felt such an aversion to taking money from Letty's aunt in Letty's presence, but when she beckoned, he went and stood before her almost shamefacedly. “You were a very nice boy to carry my bag, and I want to give you something for it,” said Mrs. Helen, benevolently; and opening a rich leather purse, she brought out first a large two-cent copper piece, looked at it carefully, put it back, and after renewed search at last discovered a penny.

“There! And I'm sure you're a very nice willing boy!” she said as she pressed it into his hand.

Mrs. Helen Von Donhoff, — she had *Frau Oberstlieutenant Baron Von Donhoff* on her cards, — having arrived in the above-described fashion, proceeded during the next week or so to install herself with every indication of meaning to stay. *J'y suis, j'y reste*, sure enough! She was so good-humored, gay, cheerful, and polite about it that nobody could have grudged her lodging and entertainment although her hosts were driven to a hundred petty shifts and discomforts to accommodate her, and that unlucky old Edward had to stretch his credit with the grocer, the butcher, the milkman, and half a dozen other tradesmen whose amiability had already been severely strained. Mrs. Helen, who was amazingly discreet and temperate about her own expenditures, must certainly have had enough experience in this world's ways to see or guess at the narrowness of her brother's means; but, if she did, she considerably forbore to show it, smilingly took the best they had, and doubled the burdens and labors of their housekeeping with a charming unconsciousness. She made a point of

never seeing or hearing anything disagreeable, she said — adding that she thought herself unusually blessed in possessing the temperament.

Letty, for her part, was delighted with the stir this visitor made in the well-nigh stagnant life of the house. She enjoyed sleeping on a pallet on the floor in one of the back rooms, while her mother slept on a rattletrap old canvas cot alongside, their own room having been given over to the guest. She eagerly performed such offices as carrying in Mrs. Von Donhoff's breakfast on a tray when that lady sat up in bed to receive it at eleven o'clock in the morning, and getting her bath ready — these being transatlantic customs which the Frau Baron had imported. Also, in the course of time, Letty got quite used to certain phenomena connected with her great-aunt's personal appearance, which had at first reduced her to goggle-eyed wonder ; such as the remarkable greenish, yellowish, mottled hue and tripelike texture of the old lady's countenance during the morning hours, as compared with the peachy bloom and softness it assumed about five P.M. ; or the slatternly abundance of her figure in bed and in the easily flowing and not over-fresh muslin wrappers decorated with dingy blue and pink ribbons which she wore most of the day, and the elegant trimness of the same figure after a toilet made for the public view. Letty knew — having many times assisted in the operation — how much muscle and dexterity it took to squeeze this elderly heroine into her steel and whalebone, into her flimsy, high-heeled slippers, into all the belts, buckles, garters, straps, what-not wherewith Mrs. Helen's beauties were enhanced or preserved. If there was one hand-glass in the room there were twenty ; regiments of cold-cream bottles, powder-boxes, and flasks of cologne crowded the washstand and mantel-shelf ; mysterious curling scalp-locks and braids cluttered the toilet-table ; Letty fetched and carried amongst all this ignoble stuff like a little spaniel,

and her aunt rewarded her with a rather embarrassing profusion of kisses and caresses, not hesitating to declare in her own presence that the child was the brightest, sweetest, most lovable little thing ever seen, and, moreover, bade fair to become a perfect beauty as she grew up.

"Your aunt only says things like that because she thinks it's nice, you know, Letty," her mother warned her dryly, in private; and Letty nodded with a slightly sheepish expression. She had had her suspicions; Mrs. Von Donhoff's manner did not carry conviction even to the child; her speeches were almost *too* nice. Mrs. Breen, in particular, never seemed to be much impressed by them; but Letty's mother undeniably was, as Mrs. Van Donhoff confided to her brother, a singularly chilly, matter-of-fact, and unapproachable sort of person. Old Helen herself had a pronounced social gift; she was fond of people, made friends readily, and if no one of her own station was handy, would address her talk to any servant with a kind of jocose condescension. She had a good many anecdotes beginning: "When we were in Baden-Baden —" "When we were in Homburg —" "When the Baron was at Monte Carlo —" etc., sometimes making pretty familiar use of great names, and always contriving a lively, amusing, and dramatic tale. Indeed, some of them were altogether too lively for a child's ears, but Letty, not comprehending the half, went unharmed. The little girl often wondered, but was too shy to ask, how it was that the Herr Oberst-lieutenant had travelled to and sojourned in such a variety of places, and where was his *home*? He had died at Paris about the time of the Prussian siege — when Letty was a baby. What — she longed to find out — had Aunt Helen been doing, and where had she been living all this while since? No one else seemed to feel any curiosity on the point.

There was not much field, alas, for the display of Mrs. Helen's attractions, her ornate costumes, and her flow

of conversation here in Muskingum Street; the lady herself felt this lack, and began, without doubt, to be prodigiously bored — *ennuyée'd*, she would have said — after four or five weeks of it. But though she spoke vaguely of going to visit several dear friends widely scattered all over the country from whom, it appeared, she had received many pressing invitations, she made no move looking that way.

"Sylvanus and Charlotte wanted me to stop with them, when I saw them in Washington, after I landed," she said to her brother. "But the atmosphere of the house wasn't very pleasant. Sylvanus looks badly, Edward; I — ahem — shouldn't be surprised if we didn't have the poor dear fellow with us much longer. It's very distressing to see anybody in that state; my nerves aren't strong enough for it. And you know Charlotte always has been a little *difficult* — not at all — er — sympathetic. Something about Harry's wife suggests the same disposition — Martha, of course, is a dear, noble woman, but — " and she made the comment quoted above, concluding with, "on the whole, I think it's fortunate the child isn't at all like her. Letty is all Breen — those great black eyes! I understand the youngster's begun to use them already with killing effect on some boy in the neighborhood. Mercy, Edward, what a look! Don't eat me up!"

"Do I understand you to say that Letty has been — um — carrying on some kind of — of flirtation?" inquired the old gentleman, severely. "I assure you, you are mistaken — and if you will forgive my saying so bluntly, Helen, it is not a subject for joking. These neighborhood children are not fit associates for a Miss Breen, as you yourself can see. Letty never speaks to them — she has been strictly forbidden — "

His sister gave an amused exclamation. "Oh, la, la, la! Forbidden to speak to them! That's just the way to make her want to! 'Forbidden to speak to

them !' And so, you may be sure she's spoken to them whenever she's had the chance. What Turks men are !"

"I repeat you are mistaken," said Edward, making slight irritated movements with his hands ; "it's impossible. Letty — is — she's very good — very obedient — she's not at all that kind of little girl."

"Every little girl is that kind of little girl," said Mrs. Von Donhoff, imperturbably good-humored. "As to my being mistaken, I've seen the young gentleman — your laundress's son. I caught him telegraphing some amorous message — I've no doubt — to Letty when he thought all our backs were turned —"

"*What!* Good heavens, Helen, and you never said anything!"

Mrs. Von Donhoff laughed outright ; the incident, and Mr. Breen's reception of it, amused her profoundly. "Edward, it was the day I arrived. I knew nothing about the boy, or Letty, or your — your exceedingly careful and judicious domestic government. Since then I've heard from 'Lizbeth —"

"Oh, 'Lizbeth! A *servant* —!" said Mr. Breen, with becoming scorn ; "if you're going to listen to a servant's gabble —"

"Exactly so ! I listened to a servant's gabble," retorted the lady, unmoved ; "it's quite a romance. They met by stealth in the summer-house, exchanged vows, tokens, what you choose. 'Lizbeth found them kissing —"

"*Stop!*" cried out old Edward, so violently that his sister obeyed, startled, and surveying him with a curiosity not untouched by alarm. He was strangely and disproportionately excited over this trivial business, it seemed to her ; overexcited and overworried. She had a moment of regret, thinking that Edward was not so young as he had been, was really a good deal broken, and that she ought not to have teased him. He com-

manded himself with an obvious effort. "I beg your pardon, Helen, I — I was very discourteous — I had no intention of playing the bully — " he said in chivalrous humility — "but the subject is disagreeable — of course it was your duty to tell me. Only I beg you will not refer to it again, especially in this — this light way. I will, of course, attend to — to — er — to Letty at once."

"But you are taking it *au grand sérieux!*" exclaimed Mrs. Von Donhoff, in astonishment; "and they're nothing but two children! In a month — in a week — in a day or so it is all over — finished — *pouf!* Like that!" — she snapped her fingers — "Juliet will have another Romeo, and Romeo — ah, Romeo will console himself. They're all like that. Do I not know? I assure you that I, I who speak to you, that I also have — " she completed the sentence with a shrug and gesture airily significant of a world-wide experience.

Mr. Breen looked at her uneasily; these alien tricks of speech and manner remotely disturbed him; they seemed to indicate something equally alien in her point of view, morally, mentally, every way. "Helen," he said weightily, "you evidently don't realize what this — this about Letty — er — what it recalls, or what — um — it might foreshadow. The child is father to the man, as Mr. Pope once remarked, I believe — a very true saying. Besides, I suppose I might as well tell you, it — it rather disquiets me to observe how much Letty is growing to look like a — like an unfortunate member of our family — " said old Edward, halting and shying painfully.

"Eh? You mean — ?" The brother and sister exchanged a glance, grave and reluctant on Edward's side, rather frivolously interested on Mrs. Helen's. "Truly? Does Letty look like her?" she said eagerly. "I can't remember at all, you know, Edward, I was only a baby at the time — "

"At the time of the — the rupture. Yes, I know,"

said old Breen, nervously. "I was six or seven years old. She was a very attractive woman, Helen — of course a little boy always thinks his mother is the most beautiful person on earth — still, I know her to have been an attractive woman. There was a picture of her, painted in a pink dress open at the neck, with some sort of needlework or embroidery in her hand—I remember father giving orders for it to be destroyed or got rid of somehow, and how I cried, as children will, and his punishing me with his cane — "

"Ah-h, *le pauvre p'tit* —!" sighed Mrs. Von Donhoff, much affected by this detail. Mr. Breen was too much absorbed in his subject to notice her.

"The point is," he went on with earnestness, "that Letty does unquestionably look like that picture — as I recall it — and like her — her — the original. And now this disgraceful affair with some low boy from these gutters—by the Lord Harry!" said old Edward, who occasionally allowed himself what he considered a perfectly gentlemanly profanity in the presence of the ladies of his family; "by the Lord Harry, Helen, I don't like it! I won't have it! I mean to put a stop to it in a way she'll remember!" he declaimed with great force. "And as for this boy — did you say it was the Hatfield boy?"

Mrs. Von Donhoff spread her hands. "How do I know? It was your laundress's son — a young *gamin* with red hair. The laundress is a giantess with a voice to split your ears — "

"Yes, I know — they're a bad lot. We might as well get rid of them," said Mr. Breen, magisterially. "The mother's a screeching virago and the father a ruffianly fellow, one of that old, outlawed, bloody, vindictive set of West Virginia Hatfields, I've been told, that are forever having a feud with somebody — "

"What, a feud? A vendetta? How interesting! I remember when we were in Corsica there was one be-

tween the Corleone and the Rodolfi — ” she paused on a new thought. “But, Edward, won’t one of them get behind a bush, and stick a knife into your back if you — ”

“If I dismiss the lady? Oh, hardly,” said Mr. Breen, with a smile which was suddenly eclipsed as he recollected that he was owing Mrs. Hatfield for the last three weeks! He made an impatient movement; good God, things had come to a pretty pass if he couldn’t dismiss a washerwoman—! And it was through no fault of his that he was short of money, he told himself miserably, as he had a thousand times before; he would have to explain to Sylvanus that by a combination of circumstances — of course he wasn’t going to say that it was Helen’s visit, in part — he would be obliged, my dear brother, etc., etc. Edward rehearsed these tolerably well-worn sentences to himself with a frown which his sister, observing, supposed to be directed at Letty, innocently approaching them.

“Here is Mademoiselle Capulet now! You are about to begin, eh?” she said, rising quickly. “I save myself — I escape — I retire — ”

“No, no, don’t do that!” said old Breen, in alarm; “I — I — of course I don’t mean to speak to the child *now*, Helen. The — the occasion is not — is not suitable. Does her mother know? Her mother ought to know — it’s her prerogative to correct Letty. I — I meant to speak to Martha, you know. I have no desire to interfere. The whole business is very unpleasant, anyhow—it seems to me unpleasant things are always happening!” he ended fretfully. Perhaps for one instant he was conscious of the futility of his own character.

Mrs. Von Donhoff sat down again with a grimace behind her fan. This was Edward’s way of enforcing his terrific discipline — *quel succès!* she thought in French, satirically. Whatever Mrs. Helen’s weaknesses, she

had at least throughout a very varied career always known her own mind, and done what she set out to do. She thought, besides, that her brother was making a mountain out of a mole-hill; and that there was something *bourgeois* in his attitude. All young people — and some who were, ahem! not so young — she said to herself, glancing into her mirror, had affairs of the heart; yes, married or single, it was as natural to be in love with somebody as for the sparks to fly upwards. And as for that old dead-and-buried scandal about their mother, why go digging that up and worrying over it now? Supposing the poor pretty young woman *did* have a — put it plainly — a lover? It was no such awful matter when all was said and done — and “I daresay *ce cher Papa* wasn’t so very easy to live with. What would you? One must have some diversion,” said Helen, inwardly, with another grimace. She repeated discontentedly that Edward had grown to be frightfully *bourgeois* and provincial; what else could you expect in this stupid little hole? An outsider might very well have inquired, Why did the Frau Oberstlieutenant Baron, etc., stay there? Why, indeed?

“Doesn’t one ever go anywhere, or receive visits here, my dear?” she asked Mrs. Breen.

“I don’t go anywhere, or see anybody, if that is what you mean,” said the other, raising her eyes from her embroidery, and looking at the guest calmly. Mrs. Van Donhoff was a little embarrassed by this plainness; she was on a very formal footing with Letty’s mother.

“I think you make a mistake,” she said with a rather awkward amiability; “you oughtn’t to shut yourself up like a hermit, even if you do feel — ah — badly about poor dear Harry. It’s on account of him, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Breen, without emotion; “yes, I’ve never gone anywhere since.”

“But, my dear, it’s ten years, isn’t it? I should think you might, after all this time. And the world

forgets, you know. People only think you're queer to stay at home — "

"I've never gone anywhere since," repeated Mrs. Breen, in the accent of finality; and old Helen gave it up with her shrug. What a life! she thought. And all because of a husband — !

CHAPTER V

MR. BREEN, having once more arrived at that grim locality whither he had already journeyed nobody knows how many times, namely, the end of his tether, now sat down and spent a good part of his day over one of those letters to Bishop Sylvanus of which we have seen some samples. Wonderful was the ingenuity Edward employed upon these documents; he never asked his brother for money or thanked him on receiving it twice in the same words! — a fact upon which, indeed, Mrs. Sylvanus had commented acridly more than once. This one, however, was not answered with the bishop's habitual promptness; it began to look as if Edward's eloquence had, for that one time, failed. A week went by; a number of long-standing bills came around again; a collector called; Mrs. Hatfield's prospects, had she known it, were receding briskly, when at last there came a letter from Washington which old Breen — after having examined and folded away the check it contained with infinite relief — read with a disturbed countenance. He showed it to his sister. It began with a line or two, cramped and uncertain; Sylvanus would have responded earlier, but he had not been feeling well; he found the heat very hard on him this summer. He hoped the enclosed which he took great pleasure in sending would relieve any temporary difficulty, and —

And here the characters which had been very feebly scrawled trailing off into nothing, the letter had been carried on in another hand that looked startlingly clear, strong, and well formed by contrast. “. . . Bishop

Breen was taken seriously ill while writing this letter, which he has requested me to finish, as, although somewhat improved and resting easily, he is unable to hold a pen. He wants me to say to you that you are to consider the enclosed as a little present, and not to have it on your mind to return it, nor to worry about anything of the same kind he may have sent in times past. And he sends you his love, and kind remembrances to Harry's wife and the little girl, and love to Helen.

"The attack has affected his entire right side, but his mind is clear, and the doctors do not fear any immediate danger. Mrs. Breen or I will, of course, keep you informed of his condition.

"Very sincerely,

"D. W. GATES."

Mrs. Von Donhoff read it over and handed it back with a perceptible cloud on her carefully arranged and tinted features which generally wore so arch and lively and youthful an expression. The brother and sister were silent a moment, each perhaps trying to envisage the fact that Sylvanus was an old man—so old that any illness must be of dubious result—and, alas! if he was old, what were they? There were only a few years between them all. One of the most depressing things connected with the death of a contemporary is the rediscovery of our own age; Edward and Helen felt it, with a passing tremor.

"I think I'll go and write to Charlotte," said the lady, at length, getting up. She hesitated. "I suppose I'd better in the circumstances, eh, Edward? We don't know what may happen, and it might please poor Syl. The fact is, Charlotte and I didn't part—er—kindly. We had a difference, and she was very rude and offensive in her remarks, or I *might* have stayed longer," said Mrs. Helen, reddening through her rouge at some humiliating recollection; "I think it pained Sylvanus a good deal—of course he only heard her side of it, and I couldn't say

anything. But this isn't any time to treasure up things of that sort."

Old Edward waved his hand. "Charlotte's people were very common, Helen; you ought always to remember that. It was a great step upwards for her to marry into the Breen family — but, as the homely old proverb has it, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. You have to allow for her early environment. Charlotte has never been a friend of mine, either; but of course I shall write to both of them at once." He glanced again at the letter. "Who do you suppose D. W. Gates is? Some secretary Syl employs? He doesn't write like a servant."

"Oh, no. That's Web Gates — Dannie Gates; they used to call him Dannie when he was a little fellow, don't you remember, but it's Webster now. Don't you remember? Charlotte's sister's son? He's about thirty years old now. His mother was Julia Riggins, I think, and then she married Mr. Gates, who was a lawyer there in Buffalo, and they had this one child. They're both dead now. He lives in Columbus — wealthy, of course. He and Charlotte must own most of the Snowflake Starch business between them. Sylvanus told me about him — Syl likes him very much. I suppose he was visiting them when this happened. Poor Sylvanus!" sighed Mrs. Von Donhoff, and went off to write her letter. She and her brother were quite busy at this congenial task the rest of the day, meditating and turning their phrases of sympathy and affection with a nice taste; and in the evening sat together in the porch and exchanged reminiscences about Sylvanus's boyhood and youth of a highly edifying nature. If the bishop could have heard them, even he might have been astonished to learn what a strong, intellectual, tender, and noble character he was!

As it happened, however, poor old Sylvanus Breen never read those letters wherein his brother and sister

had hastened to express so much gratitude and loving thought, never read any more letters from them or anybody, never again sent a little present, or worried his own head, which was surely that of a kind and honest man, about the needy and foolish and improvident whom he had shepherded so long. There were lights burning all that night in the great, dull Washington house and feet going to and fro with subdued hurry; and about three o'clock in the morning, Mr. Daniel Webster Gates, looking rather haggard in the clothes he had not taken off for thirty-six hours, came out of the little study next to the bishop's bedroom, closing the door behind him with a gentleness some would have thought unnecessary now, and went downstairs to the library where a tired young reporter was fast asleep and snoring amongst the grave works on divinity, and, rousing him, dictated something in a low voice, which the city read at all its breakfast tables a few hours later. "BREEN — At his residence, 15 Lorrimer Circle, Rt. Rev'd Sylvanus Breen, D.D., in the seventy-ninth year of his age. Due notice of funeral will be given. Buffalo, New York, Cincinnati and Columbus (Ohio) papers please copy."

Little Letty Breen cut out the notice and some obituaries which appeared later, and pasted them in her scrap-book. She was very much impressed when the telegram arrived announcing with the unstudied dramatic brevity of telegrams: "Bishop Breen died half-past 2 this morning will write. D. W. G.," and the messenger boy, having handed it in, strolled away whistling — another unconscious touch of drama. Letty, who, in all honesty and simplicity, classed Uncle Sylvanus with George Washington, the Duke of Wellington, Samuel J. Tilden, and other more or less antique celebrities, vaguely expected some family demonstration at this solemn tidings — "My brother, oh, my brother! . . ." But, happily, nothing of the kind occurred.

"Poor Syl's gone, Helen," her grandfather said in a grave but perfectly contained voice; he laid the paper down, and took off his eye-glasses and began to rub them thoughtfully. "Poor Syl!" he repeated.

"Does it say what the trouble was?" asked Mrs. Von Donhoff, also quite collectedly.

"No, but of course it must have been a stroke that he had the other day, although they didn't call it that — poor Syl! I hope he didn't suffer—I do hope and trust Sylvanus didn't suffer!" said the old gentleman, with feeling. He was a humane man. Awhile afterwards, Letty heard him discoursing to her aunt and mother with an unusual animation as they sat together. ". . . Of course, Sylvanus's private fortune was not large — nothing to compare with his wife's, for instance. Still he must have accumulated considerable. We all had the same to start with, but Sylvanus was never subjected to the drain that I have been —"

"Or I. That is true," said Mrs. Von Donhoff.

"He had no family — he never had to make any sacrifices or — or — in short, to contract any debts — he was always very lucky. And then, Helen, you know as well as I that dear Syl, though he was goodness and kindness itself, had always an eye to the main chance. Sylvanus was thrifty and economical to the point of — well," said old Edward, with a large air, "I won't say parsimony, but it verged on it — it verged on it. He never spent where he couldn't see a fair return —"

"Charlotte always had him under her thumb, anyhow. She held the purse-strings," said Mrs. Helen. "She's always been — how does one say it in English? — I declare I've forgotten — *maitresse femme!*"

"Exactly. And with all that, her own fortune must be enormous. That's what makes me think, as I was saying, Helen, that Sylvanus can't possibly have left her everything. It would be absurd — and — and unjust," said Mr. Breen, energetically. "If Charlotte were needy,

it would be different. I'm sure we don't grudge it to her in any case. But Sylvanus was a just man, and I am confident he would have thought his property ought to go back where it came from — to his own family. That would be only natural and right."

Letty listened, open-eared, and dimly dissatisfied or disappointed. This death, which her romances presented as a thing so dread and majestic, had turned out to be sadly prosaic, after all; and she viewed with a helpless and resentful bewilderment the inconsistencies of her elders who starkly forbade her to mention money because it would be mean and vulgar, yet were now discussing it themselves with relish enough! The only event of the day which at all approached her previous ideas of what should happen in the house of mourning occurred that evening when her aunt, being about to go to bed with the help of her little handmaid, suddenly and most inconsequently burst into hysterical tears, with sighings and sniffings and foreign ejaculations which perturbed Letty greatly. The child, who had never seen a grown woman cry, did not know what to do; old Helen, uncorseted and spreading flabbily over the chair, sobbing and hiccupping, among her powder-puffs and greasy ribbons, was a staggering spectacle. Letty had a sensation of guilt at not feeling sorry for her; she would have pretended to be, if she had known how. As it was, after some embarrassed fidgeting she said, "I — I guess I'd better get Mother," and started for the door. But Mrs. Von Donhoff clung to her with fresh wailings.

"No, no, no, don't leave me, *chérie*, don't leave me alone. I'm afraid to be alone — and I'm all alone — all alone! I haven't anybody! Don't leave me — dear little Letty!" she sobbed with caresses, under which dear little Letty wriggled uneasily. The youngster's upbringing and perhaps some half-developed instinct of her own gave her a strong distaste for this

sort of scene, these demonstrations. Fortunately Mrs. Breen, hearing the commotion, came in at that moment, ready for bed, with her fair hair braided smoothly down her back, and her thin, fair face composed and steady, as usual. She made hardly any remark, busying herself about the older woman with a kind of silent gentleness, and Mrs. Von Donhoff speedily quieted down in that cool presence. To tell the truth, poor old Helen was in her secret soul a good deal afraid of Harry's wife. "*Mon Dieu*, but she is a stone, that woman! One dashes one's self against her, and always she goes on sewing!" she used to think, not without terror.

"It is nothing, my dear, it is absolutely nothing!" she quavered. "Letty, give me the c-cognac, *petite*. Just a drop — a quite little drop!" And having thus bolstered up her nerves, Mrs. Von Donhoff, between sips of the cognac, of which liquor she was pretty fond, explained: "I don't think I realized it before — about Sylvanus. It all came like *that*. *Pam!* A clap of thunder! I was thinking of a time when we were all children, not so big as you, my sweet little angel Letty, and I took some trifle from the pantry — jam — tarts — I don't remember any more what it was. And father would assuredly have whipped me for it — he had his ideas, that poor father! — but Sylvanus said *he* did it. He t-took the bl-blame and the whipping!" said the old lady, with more tears.

"Did he?" said Mrs. Breen. Her face softened inexplicably. "Oh, the poor little fellow — the dear little fellow!" she said with a note of wistful tenderness in her voice. She, too, forgot that this boy was the white-haired old man who lay dead in his house in Washington, with the curtains drawn, and his wife praying sternly in the room overhead. Old Helen stopped her sniffing to stare in surprise; she had not looked for so much sympathetic understanding from that quarter.

The obituaries and the brief sketches of Bishop Breen's life and achievements which appeared at this time, and from which Letty collected her samples, all agree upon the fact that the funeral ceremonies were perfectly simple and quiet and devoid of ostentation; and not attended by many persons outside of the family, as it was a very hot season of the year, towards the end of August, and the world was mostly at the mountains and the seashore. They took place in the capital city of this state where Sylvanus had lived for years during his sway over the Southern Diocese — "in the family lot in Greenwood, that father bought when he first moved West. I doubt if poor Syl ever thought of providing one for himself in any Washington cemetery," said Mr. Breen, with a sigh. There was considerable stir in the household; letters and telegrams sped to and fro between Edward and the distant, shadowy, yet authoritative, D. W. Gates. Mrs. Von Donhoff ransacked her gloriously hued wardrobe for a suitable mourning costume, and triumphantly brought forth a black silk with blackly shining jet fringe and bows, loops, and rosettes of Persian-patterned trimming cunningly adjusted here and there. "If you'll just take these off, my dear, and then put on this dull passementerie I saved from that foulard Madame Cerise made—you can do it, you know—you have such fairy fingers—a true French touch. I often think you must have some French in you," she remarked affably to Letty's mother, depositing the whole mass of silk flummery in the latter's lap, and airily turning to something else. Mrs. Breen accepted the task with a faint smile, though she already had a hundred things to do; she did them all; work seemed to be a kind of fanaticism with her.

It is so difficult to associate railroad journeys and new clothes with anything but some kind of a lark, that Letty, who had for this occasion a new black-and-

white plaid gingham, and a new black ribbon on her last year's hat, in which gear she looked, her aunt rapturously exclaimed, "like a charming little chicken of the — eh, what do you call it? — the *Dominique* tribe!" — Letty, I say, found herself on the trip to Columbus in a disgracefully cheerful state of mind. For that matter, her elders in their mourning trappings did not appear notably depressed. They chatted together in their ordinary style on indifferent subjects until the moment of arrival, when all at once Letty observed a cloud of gravity to descend upon the party! It was miraculous; they all clothed themselves with it as with a garment. They even walked with a certain solemnity which she dutifully tried to imitate. The party was presently met and escorted to a side street, where there were some grave-looking carriages in waiting, by the most magnificent person whom it had ever been little Letty Breen's lot to behold. This was a slender and tall gentleman in beautiful light-gray clothes, with a mysterious black band around his left arm, and a soft gray hat, and a black tie, and a short black silk ribbon with a gold buckle attached thereto depending from one pocket, where it was anchored down by his watch, as it appeared, and gold cuff buttons, and — and innumerable other accessories so striking that Letty forgot altogether to look at his face.

"Mr. Breen, I think?" said this noble apparition, singling them out readily; and Mrs. Von Donhoff came forward with a decent air of grief held in check, and gave him a hand, while hastily and skilfully dabbing her handkerchief to her eyes with the other.

"Ah, Webster!" she said with a sigh, "this is a very sad way for us to meet. It's Webster Gates, isn't it? Your poor uncle talked about you so much the last time I saw him. It's Charlotte's nephew, you know, Edward, that you've been having all the correspondence with." And everybody shook hands

in a subdued fashion — everybody except Mr. Gates himself, that is, who had about him a certain quiet and matter-of-fact air, and spoke in a natural voice. Besides him there were other relatives: a stout lady in a rich black dress with crape and bugles on her polonaise and bonnet, and a handsome brooch of jet and diamonds in a lace cravat at her throat — Mrs. Carberry Riggins. She was about the age of Letty's Aunt Helen, and gave that lady a hard stare and then a very frigid, distant salute when they met, which Mrs. Von Donhoff had the appearance of graciously overlooking. Mrs. Alfred Breen and her daughter Eliza: two slim, angular ladies, the elder in rusted mourning and a long veil, the other in a black cashmere, exhaling a faint aroma, it might be, of recent dye, the bodice pulling away and showing white at all the seams, with a strange effect of immodesty. Cousin Augustus Breen, an old gentleman with an ear-trumpet, and that fine conversational gift, coupled with an insatiable thirst for information, which Letty forever afterwards associated with ear-trumpets. Another old gentleman, but a very taciturn one, in a long linen duster and ferocious dark felt slouched hat, his appearance thus striking a nice mean between Abraham Lincoln and Sure-shot Sam, — as Letty conceived the latter, — was Cousin Howard Breen. And at the last, her uncle Tom Breen, who came up and greeted his father and the family with a great deal of warmth and handshaking, and whom Letty, remembering the whiskers and plaid trousers of the picture at home, eyed with interest. He was a big red-faced man nowadays, but still wore clothing of a noticeable pattern, and had a mustache, and a gold horseshoe pin with diamond nails in his purple necktie.

“Yes — yes. I was in Cleveland on a business deal — first time, by George, I've been this far East in years — coincidence, wasn't it? When I heard about Uncle

Syl, I just thought I'd run down for the funeral — show respect, you know. By George, it was the last thing I could do for the old gentleman, and I thought I'd better do it," he explained to his father, while young Gates was expeditiously herding everybody into the carriages, answering everybody's questions, and seeing to everybody's comfort with an astonishing unhurried despatch. His aunt was already on her way to the cemetery — yes, she was quite well, thank you — yes, of course, this was very hard for her, but she had shown a great deal of resolution and self-control. — Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Will Breen were here in town at the hotel. Yes, the — er — was at the Mortuary Chapel in Greenwood; they had thought it best to have the service there. Eh? Oh, no — that wouldn't be possible — at least, it would be much better not, you understand — The — er — had been shipped from Washington —

"I haven't seen Sylvanus for a long while. Not for twenty-five years, I believe," said Cousin Augustus, in a loud, clear, and determined voice, pausing with one foot on the carriage step. He unwound the trumpet and screwed it into his ear, with a firm expression. "I have been expecting to see Sylvanus. They tell me he hadn't changed much —"

"Well, did you ever *see* anything like Cousin Augustus?" said Mrs. Alfred Breen, in a shocked undertone, looking around upon the family; "*of all things — !*"

"Hey? Oh! Well, just as you say. It is, of course, very hot weather," said the old gentleman, nodding in answer to a hurried word or two from Mr. Gates, and beginning deliberately to take his seat.

"*Isn't* that just *like* Cousin Augustus?" ejaculated Mrs. Alfred, muffled but despairing.

"Kind of acts like he came from Missouri, don't he?" said Tom Breen. Then he suddenly appeared to recollect himself, coughed, and looked out of the window.

Mrs. Riggins, who was standing on the curb, scanning

the carriages, all at once set her face resolutely and signalled to Mr. Gates. "Daniel," she said, speaking also with a lowered voice, but a deal of determination, "I don't want to give trouble or make myself disagreeable, and I wouldn't say anything if it wasn't a matter of *principle*—but knowing how your Aunt Charlotte feels—to say nothing of my own opinions—I *have* to say I will *not* go in the same carriage with Mrs. Von D——."

"That's all right, Cousin Caroline, you don't have to—here's your carriage down here," interposed the young man, gently propelling her in that direction. He turned as Letty's mother, leaning out, spoke with some anxiety:—

"My little girl, Mr. Gates? There she is, right behind you. Never mind, anywhere will do where she won't be in the way. She could come in here and sit in my lap—Letty—"

"What's that, Mrs. Breen? Your little girl?"—he gazed about openly perplexed. "Why, I haven't seen—oh, is *that* the one? I didn't know she *belonged*—" his eyes roamed over Letty, and up and down the line of vehicles. "No, no, she'd better not get in with you—you're crowded enough already. She can come with me. Come on—er—little girl—come along." He gave her an imperative gesture, and Letty followed him shyly, in obedience to her mother's nod.

She was acutely conscious of the rich bloom of dust on her boots and black ribbons, of the creases in her dress, of her own awkward and inconvenient and generally undesirable personality, as she shrank down into the corner opposite him and the wheels began to move. There was not a speck of dust on Mr. Gates anywhere; he was neat, elegant, and cool on this sweltering day in his gray clothes. She was thankful that he did not look at her, and sat in a stony immobility for fear of disturbing him or attracting his notice. That, however,

did not seem at all likely to happen ; Mr. Gates immediately took out a black leather letter-case and plunged into some sort of review of the papers and cards it held, making pencil notes here and there. He had long, thin, strong hands ; Letty involuntarily hid her own, which were also thin, but tanned brown and, alack ! not too clean, under the folds of her scant skirts. She ventured a glance at his face ; it was narrow and dark-skinned, with straight features and a brown mustache, and a beard trimmed to a point outlining his chin. This and the easy lines of his hat gave him a kind of cavalier or Vandyke air, which Letty, who was not unfamiliar with cavaliers and their period, felt and admired. He clapped the case together at length, looked at his watch, and then out of the window at the road, which had by this time left the city streets, and was straggling through some squalid suburb cut up by railway tracks and embankments. Mr. Gates gave himself a slight stretch and shake, and suddenly fixed a disconcerting eye on Letty. The child trembled under it in an agony of self-consciousness ; she was wretchedly aware of the lazy amusement, the half-satirical tolerance with which he examined her — aware that when he spoke, he was merely making a humorous experiment.

“Grandma, what big eyes you’ve got !” he quoted from the nursery classic. “What’s the matter, Plaid Party ; you look frightened ? Cheer up ! They’re not going to bury *you*, you know.”

Letty sat before him in silence ; she could not think of anything sufficiently smart to say.

“I see I’ve transgressed the rules of etiquette — busted ’em all to flinders, in a manner of speaking,” said Mr. Gates, with abnormal gravity ; “but I didn’t suppose you’d be so rigid at your years. I oughtn’t to have spoken without an introduction. Plaid Party, I beg your pardon. My name is Gates — Daniel Webster Gates.”

Letty, feeling more at ease, looked up — and met his eyes full of laughter. Rage and bitterness swept over her; he was making fun of her still! She could not speak; the child felt all a child's desperate resentment and desperate helplessness.

"Don't lay it up against me — my name, you know," said Mr. Gates, plaintively. "I didn't do it myself. My sponsors in baptism did it; they were friends of his. Plaid Party, it's my misfortune, not my fault."

Letty wondered miserably why he couldn't let her alone, or — or talk some different way, she thought confusedly. To do him justice, the young man would have been as much distressed as he would have been astonished to know what was passing through her mind. He had no idea she understood either his words or manner.

"I'm not vain," said Mr. Gates, after a further silence, with a liberal air, "but I must say I generally make more of a success of it with your sex than this. I fear you have a cold, unyielding nature, Plaid One. Don't you *ever* speak?"

"Yes," whispered Letty, weakly. She was trying her best not to cry.

"At last!" Mr. Gates exclaimed, and waved a dramatic hand. "Perhaps you'll go so far as to tell me who you are, now?"

"My name's Letty Breen."

He bowed elaborately. "Ah, Miss Breen —" but at the moment their carriage turned off, following the others into a road between hedges; and somewhere there was a bell ringing heavily. Mr. Gates's face took on a soberness of look which was genuine this time. "We're there!" he said aloud, but to himself; and sat silent until the carriage stopped.

CHAPTER VI

THE funeral left in Letty's mind a huddled impression of twilight interiors and music and cold, solemn words, and people decorously sniffing, and the scent of flowers; this was succeeded by the burial, when she clung tightly to her mother's hand, blinking in the sudden change to strong sunlight, and not daring to look at that tragic opening in the ground and the mound of raw earth beside it, and the tall and blackly shrouded figure of the widow near at hand. There was a worn, old, unsteady tombstone at the head of the only other grave in the Breen lot; it was an unkempt place. In contrast to the surrounding cemetery landscape, where the clean turf and flower beds contributed an appropriate dignity and peace, old Erasmus Breen's disordered grave looked — not inappropriately, either, for that matter — as rough and careless as his life had been. What did well enough for his father was by no means suitable to the estate and character of Bishop Sylvanus, however; Letty, who knew very little about either man, was immeasurably surprised when, upon the conclusion of the services and as everybody began to move away, Mrs. Charlotte Breen addressed her nephew and one of the sextons standing near in a forcible manner and only slightly lowered voice, pointing indignantly the while to the neglected patch of ground underfoot. "... Outrageous! The place hasn't been attended to for years . . . myrtle on the mounds, do you understand? And I want one of those little tin signs with 'Special Care' on it put here, so that it can't be forgotten again. . . . Find out from the Superintendent, Daniel. . . .

Twelve or fifteen dollars? Well, will that put it all in *perfect* order? I want it done at *once*, and kept so . . .” issued from behind the black veil with a formidable emphasis. It seemed unnaturally mundane and practical from a mourner and such a Lady-Macbeth-looking person.

But, in fact, as the puzzled youngster remarked, no sooner was Bishop Breen securely bestowed than the entire company appeared to dismiss him from their minds with an incredible cheerfulness and satisfaction. “By George, we’ve done all we could for the poor old fellow!” said Tom Breen, with relief, and felt in his vest pocket for a cigar. They were already smoking in the pall-bearers’ carriage. The two clergymen entered into an earnest consultation as to whether it would be possible for one of them to “make that three-thirty train.” They had a time-table, and frowned over it. “You’d better cut across to the west entrance — by the Spencer monument, you know. Column with an angel with a harp on top — where the baby was buried the other day, don’t you recollect?” one recommended earnestly. Young Mr. Gates put his aunt into her carriage, and came over to tell them that Mrs. Breen expected the family to take dinner with her at the hotel. “I’ve notified the attorneys; she wants Uncle’s will read,” he said; all of which had to be intoned through the trumpet to Cousin Augustus, to the undisguised interest of a party of excursionists, who happened to be viewing the cemetery, and came by at the moment. “Hey? Oh, did you say the will was to be read *before* dinner?” inquired the old gentleman, with a rather doubtful countenance; and Mrs. Von Donhoff snickered behind her fan.

“I’ve been so wrought up, I really don’t know what I’m doing — absolutely hysterical, you know,” she explained hastily to the person standing nearest her. It happened to be Cousin Howard, who grunted

"Hungh!" and walked off. "Affable, ain't he?" said Tom Breen, with his cigar in the corner of his great mustache; he winked at Mrs. Helen, and they both grinned openly. Mrs. Sylvanus's carriage had gone; the gathering began to assume a most chatty, informal, and unfunereal appearance. Somebody came up and spoke kindly to Letty's mother; and Letty was told to shake hands with her Uncle Will. Uncle Will was a thin man in spectacles with a long, thin neck and active Adam's apple, as she observed. There was also an eager little excited plump lady in a light dress of summer silk decorated with something like a gross of small buttons on the skirt and basque, openwork, Lisle-thread gloves, and a hat covered with bright roses, poppies, and so on, that nodded and trembled as she talked; this turned out to be Mrs. Will Breen. "Yes, I'm Tump's wife!" she proclaimed cheerily to old Mr. Edward Breen, who received the information with a very tepid politeness. "Ah? *Tump?*" he said, evading an embrace; "well — ah — we'll have an opportunity for talk at the hotel, I hope," and stepped quickly into the waiting hack.

On this return journey Letty was billeted with her grandfather and Uncle Tom, much to her satisfaction; she had cringed at the prospect of further association with the too attentive Mr. Gates. Nobody took any notice of her now. On the contrary, the two gentlemen were absorbed in discussions about stocks and shares which swept on over Letty's head, unheeding and unheeded. Uncle Tom got out papers and prospectuses; the pockets of his noticeable clothing bulged with them; resounding and brilliant titles floated on the air. "I tell you, father, it's a cinch — a dead-sure proposition. You double your money in six months. Of course I don't set up to be an infallible prophet," said Tom, reasonably; "misfortunes do happen. A stroke of lightning might hit either one of us as we sit here, for

that matter — but I think you'll agree with me it's not very likely. Well, that's what I say about the Pike's Peak Development Company — something *might* happen, but as far as human probabilities go, it's as solid as a rock. I've *been* there and *seen*, and they'd have to get up pretty early to fool somebody right on the ground that way, eh? Anyway, you want to go in *now* — strike while the iron's hot — get in quick and get out quick. That's the whole secret of success in this kind of trading; then if she does bust up on somebody, what difference does it make to you? You've made your haul. See?"

"Oh, I — I wouldn't want to do that, Thomas," said the old gentleman, shrinking indefinitely. "I — I'm not very familiar with your modern business methods, but I — I wouldn't care to go into an enterprise and then abandon it in — in that way. If you have faith in a thing, you — you don't want to — er — to draw out, and leave somebody else in trouble. 'Don't give up the ship!' you know — eh?" said old Edward. He groped uneasily among certain notions of honor and loyalty which he vaguely perceived to have no place in his son's world of commercial juggling; yet he was ashamed of his own unsophisticated attitude, and a little afraid of the other's amusement. They had not met for several years; and in spite of their brisk interchange of letters, and of the various transactions which should have made them tolerably intimate, Edward felt with a start that he really did not know this big man in the loud clothes, with his assurance, his ready, modern levity of thought, and ingenious misuse of language, his — yes, his slightly shifty eye. But Thomas did not seem at all amused; he considered the older man's objections with a grave, patient, judicial air. Then at last he smiled in sudden comprehension.

"I guess I put it a little too strong," he said with humorous concern; "I was all worked up trying to

impress on you the necessity for prompt action, for — why, for getting a move on, you know. I didn't stop to think what it would sound like. This isn't one of the things you'd ever want to get *out* of. By George, I'd be only too glad to get *in*, and hang on by my teeth and toe-nails. I'd hate to see you lose this chance, father. It's one in a thousand. How much do you suppose Uncle Syl left? If —"

"Well, but it won't be possible for me — for the heirs to get immediate control of the property, you know, of course, Tom," said Mr. Breen, cautiously, yet with a certain nervous elation; "the estate won't be settled up for a year in all probability —"

"A *year*!" ejaculated Thomas; his face fell. Then he brightened, on a new thought. "But the old gentleman must have had a good deal of money lying in bank — uninvested, you know. I don't believe Aunt Charlotte ever let him spend any; she's as tight as the bark on a tree. You'll get that right off, anyhow, father, and it may amount to considerable —"

"Yes, it *may*," said old Edward, hopefully; "and in that case —"

"In *that* case —" echoed the other, jovially, clapping him on the knee, "you don't want to waste any time. Get in on the ground floor, sir, get in with — both — feet! You know, father," he added with an abrupt change of manner, humbly and regretfully, "I never can forget that I've let you in on some unfortunate mistakes of mine, in times past — things that didn't pan out the way I expected, and — and mistakes, in short. I lost my own money, too — but that's nothing — that don't count. The thing I can't forgive myself for is losing yours —"

"Why, that's all right, Tom, that's all right, my son," the father interrupted him, moved and generous; "it's all over and done with now. Don't go back to it — don't think about it. You acted in good faith, and

used your best judgment at the time. Deuce take it, we're all human and liable to err, aren't we?"

"Well, you see that's just what makes me so anxious to put you on to this now," Tom explained eagerly; "I want to get even. I — I want to justify your confidence —" the two men shook hands with some emotion. Even the listening child came under the spell; and all the carriage rolled forward in a golden dream.

The family dinner, which was held in a private room of the hotel in a style which all the mourners felt to be very handsome and exclusive, went off well enough, not without some cheerful animation, in fact, notwithstanding the solemnity of the occasion and the presence of the widow at the head of the table. Letty looked with eyes of awe at that tall and grim and ungainly figure in the flowing crape head-dress which was now put back from around her pallid face; this was the redoubtable Aunt Charlotte of the millions and the close fist. She was not greatly changed, except as to costume, since the days, thirty-odd years before, when Mr. Barton had reproduced her long horse-jaw and pale blue eyes, her pearls and feathers, on his faithful canvas; with all the good-will in the world, with the miracle-working good-will of a portrait-painter, he could not make a beauty of Charlotte, and her homeliness had endured monumentally. Who knows what moments of bitterness it had caused her? Even a bishop's wife, and a millionnaress is a woman, after all; and though poor Mrs. Sylvanus knew that she had twice the sense and ten times the character of the best-looking Breen that ever lived, there had doubtless been hours in her life when she would have changed it all for a straight nose or a delicate complexion. She was past those idle desires now, and sat at the head of her table assured and formidable among her husband's relatives, and quite indifferent to their fear, dislike, and respect, treating them all with an iron civility.

Her austere glance hardly abated, even when it fell on the only child in the company.

"Is that your little girl?" she said to Mrs. Harry; "come here to me, little girl — what did you say her name was? Oh, Letty? Come here, Letty."

It transpired that Letty's mother had ridden back with Mrs. Sylvanus at the latter's request, and she had the younger woman sitting by her now — circumstances which occasioned some raising of eyebrows among the rest. Letty went up timidly and put her hand into the other's long, cold, bony grip, and the old lady kissed her on the forehead. The caress was as frigid and awkward as all of Charlotte's movements, and left the child conscious only of the old face unpleasantly close to hers, with, alas! some stout bristles on its chin. She retreated quickly, and the widow withdrew her own hand from the small shoulder with something almost like a sigh. "I had a little girl once," she said in her harsh voice, turning to Mrs. Harry; "but mine only lived to be three months old — no, it was three months and two days. Her name was Margaret. I think she looked a little like your little girl — only she had blue eyes. She was quite bright, noticing things, you know — I mean, of course, for that age," she added hastily. Letty's mother looked at her, again with that sudden, inscrutable softness. Mrs. Von Donhoff murmured to her brother that poor Charlotte was really very much broken. Little Mrs. William Breen, from her end of the table, caught with interest this fragment of talk which seemed rather to have embarrassed the others within hearing, but she was too far off to address Mrs. Sylvanus directly.

"Didn't Aunt Charlotte ever have any other children?" she asked. "No? Isn't that a shame? I can just see how fond she is of them. I wish we'd brought ours — she'd have just *loved* them, I know. We might have brought Bubba, anyhow; but Tump

wouldn't let me. He said Bubba was too little — only five, you know. 'Well,' I said, '*Tee* may be too little — she's three — but Bubba's a great big *man*, now, aren't you, Bubba?' And, do you know, that little bit of a fellow just looked up in my face and said, 'Yes, I *am*!' just as cute. Just that way, 'Yes, I *am*!' I wish you could have seen him. I do wish now we'd brought him. Tee wanted to come, too. It's the most remarkable thing about that child — she keeps saying, 'I want to see G'an'pa — I want to see G'an'pa' — just like that. Started saying it all by herself, you know, nobody put it into her head. I can't understand how she came to think of it. I'm sure I never would have even *dreamed of mentioning* — Goodness, Tump, you jogged me so I nearly spilled my gravy. Isn't Tump careless, G'an'pa?"

"Ah — *Tump*? Pardon me, but do you refer to William?" inquired old Mr. Breen, in a very cold and stately manner.

"Yes — oh, I forgot you didn't know about it. It's my pet name for him; we're great for pet names at home, and it was perfectly funny how we got *Tump* out of *William*. First it was Will, you know, and then Bill, and then Billups, and then Bumps — no, *Bimps*, it was *Bimps* and *then* Bumps, and then somehow we got to Tumps — I can't remember all the changes — I believe I've left out one — but it was simply too funny."

"Must have been. Very funny, indeed," said old Edward, returning to his plate. Young Gates caught Tom Breen's eye, and they were simultaneously attacked by an alarming fit of coughing.

"We have all pet names at home," Mrs. William further explained; "Tump's *Tump*, and I'm Daydah, and Bubba — it's *brother*, you know; my little girl was the first to call him that, because she couldn't say *brother* plainly; he was baptized, after his great-grand-

father, Erasmus, only I think *Erasmus* would be *too much* to call a *little boy* — Erasmus! Just think! So he's Bubba now. And Tee's name's Cecilia — she couldn't say that, either —"

"Charlotte holds her years pretty well, doesn't she?" observed Cousin Augustus, looking around with an amiable interest in this discovery, and quite unconscious of interrupting; "she's older than Sylvanus, and it used to show a good deal. I shouldn't be surprised if she lived ten or fifteen years longer, though. For that matter, I understand Sylvanus was in very good health up to this last illness. Our family are long-lived as a rule; my father was eighty-seven at the time of his death. I forget Uncle Erasmus's age, but he must have been over seventy. I guess you've got a good long lease yet, Edward. Mrs. Erasmus Breen lived to be ninety-something; *she was a beautiful woman* — I remember my father remarking that Aunt Eleanor — hey? Oh — ah — yes — I — I — to be sure — *very hot weather we're having just now, eh?*" said the old gentleman, gobbling off incoherently in the ghastly silence which had accompanied these statements.

"By George, I don't know what Cousin Augustus would do without the weather — he'd be down to hard-pan," said Tom, under his mustache, with a fugitive grin. With years of absence he had become emancipated from the family superstitions; but even Mrs. Von Donhoff, to whom he looked for a sympathetic humor, had a troubled and forbidding air. The whole table was out of countenance. "By George, if old Grandma Breen had any fun in her, she ought to be chuckling in her grave!" he thought; "and I suppose Grandpop is whizzing round like a top in his!"

"Who was Aunt Eleanor?" Mrs. William asked brightly; "you know, I'm so new to the family, it's just lovely for me to find out about everybody — so *interesting*! Tump, you bad boy, you've never said a

word about Aunt Eleanor; was she Great-grandma Breen? Get him to hand me the trumpet, will you? I *must* ask him about her —”

“He meant me — I’m Eleanor Breen, you know — he must have meant me,” said Mrs. Alfred, hastily and gallantly casting herself into the breach; “it’s — er — it’s a little difficult to talk to him — you’d better not try, had you? Did you *ever* see anything like Cousin Augustus?” she added, to the family, helplessly.

“Why, no, he didn’t mean you. He *couldn’t* have — he said she was beautiful. What *was* she like, G’an’pa? Don’t you remember? I want to tell the children all about her — Tump Breen, what is the matter with you? Do you know you all but knocked the coffee-cup out of my hand? It’s your elbows. G’an’pa, why didn’t you have Tump taught better manners?”

“His manners are quite good enough for any company he is likely to keep, I think,” said old Edward, with a kind of acrid suavity. William Breen looked from his father to his wife, — red, angry, and impotent; it was a sorry moment for everybody except Mrs. Tump herself, who was too simple and kindly to suspect any one else of anything but simplicity and kindness.

“I expect both of us will see more of the family after this,” she said innocently; at which, after a momentary rather comical embarrassment, old Breen, who was not without a sense of humor, smiled in spite of himself.

“In that case, you can safely postpone your researches into the family history — we haven’t much time for it now, you know,” he suggested, courteously enough. His air of the fine gentleman impressed Mrs. William profoundly; she thought him the handsomest, most intellectual, elegant, and altogether admirable of old men and fathers; and discoursed about G’an’pa with bottomless enthusiasm to her husband and the neighbors when she reached home.

There was in waiting when the Breen family entered the private drawing-room, likewise reserved for them, a heavy-set, active young man with a strong jaw, blue where he shaved it, and an alert, shrewd, and humorous eye, who got up from the hotel chair of red plush where he had been sitting, reading the newspaper, and looked at everybody pretty keenly; and bowed when Mr. Gates presented him to Mrs. Sylvanus Breen, who, for her part, seemed to be expecting somebody or something different, and glanced about restively. "This is Mr. Archer Lewis, Aunt Charlotte," said the nephew; "he's come about the will, you know. Arch, this is Mr. Breen, Bishop Breen's brother."

"Are you a son of my old friend, Judge Lewis?" inquired Mr. Breen, agreeably; and the young man, eying him straightforwardly, answered yes. Thank you, his father was well. Yes, the judge remembered Mr. Breen and the bishop and the whole family — had been talking about them since this business of the bishop's will came up, naturally; and he looked hard at Tom Breen and Mrs. Von Donhoff, to whom he was introduced in order. "Eh, but he has gimlets for eyes, that young advocate! He goes to render himself sure of knowing us when we meet again," soliloquized the lady inwardly in her French, as she rolled her own fine, large, black eyes at him.

"I expected General Burke," said Mrs. Sylvanus, in her usual high and domineering manner; "he drew the will years ago, and when I made Sylvanus — when Bishop Breen added the codicils, I — he purposely picked out a time when the general was in Washington arguing a case before the Supreme Court, so he could write them, too. Isn't he coming?"

Young Lewis explained that General Burke was away at Watch Hill, taking a vacation, and that he was in charge of the office meanwhile. "My father and Mr. Burke were in partnership at one time — in fact, when

this will was drawn, I believe," he added, accounting for himself with immense gravity under the concentrated Breen suspicion. He spread the document, which appeared to be very short, before him on the table. Mrs. Carberry Riggins, observing these preparations, got up and made her farewells, pursued by the very mild protests of the company, who indeed felt that *she* had no interest in the bishop's affairs. "Oh, don't go! I'm sure you want to hear, and you know we all trust you—we really do!" said Mrs. Von Donhoff, with extraordinary sweetness and emphasis; whereupon the other lady glared steadily, and then turned her back. Mrs. Sylvanus frowned; the men looked uncomfortable; and little Letty Breen wondered within her what it was all about.

She was tired, and the day was hot, and there had been a great deal of the hotel dinner, so that she almost fell asleep in another of the red plush chairs while the reading was going on, and only caught a phrase here and there. "*In the Name of God, Amen . . . I, Sylvanus Breen, being of sound mind . . .*" The young lawyer's voice was really very strong and distinct, but in spite of that, Letty must have taken a doze during the recital of various bequests to hospitals and charitable institutions with which the bishop's will began. What roused her was a certain expectant stir amongst her elders, as he came to "*. . . the remaining property of whatever sort of which under the will of Heaven I may die possessed, I hereby give and bequeath to—to'*—ah-h—pardon me—ah-h-kchoo!" said Mr. Lewis, executing a mighty sneeze, "*give and bequeath to—'*" he paused to get out a handkerchief.

"To *who* did he say?" asked Cousin Augustus, proffering the trumpet to his nearest neighbor. This chanced to be Miss Eliza Breen, who, after an instant's hesitation, desperately seized the instrument, and shrieked into it, "He hasn't said, Cousin Augustus!"

"To Ned? Ned Breen? Well, I'll be — Oh, hasn't said? Umph!"

"*To my beloved wife, Charlotte Riggins Breen —*" young Lewis resumed inflexibly; "*to be by her held in —* ah-h — kch —"

"In trust, I suppose. Hadn't I better read for you?" said Tom Breen, impatiently.

"*In' — ah-h — kch-choo!* Excuse me — I seem to be catching cold. No, not in trust, Mr. Breen, in *fee* — absolutely, you understand —" And with a few words more the reading came to an end in a silence of blank faces. Only for a minute, however — "The following codicils —" he recommenced, laying the sheet over; and there was a renewed slight stir. It appeared that the bishop, on second thoughts, had decided to leave the sum of fifteen hundred dollars apiece to his sister, Mrs. Helen B. Von Donhoff, and to Letitia Parrish Breen, daughter of his nephew Henry Breen, and to Erasmus Breen and Cecilia Breen, children of his nephew William Breen, and — and Mr. Lewis cleared his throat, and began to assemble the papers. It was over! There was a brief silence. Cousin Howard Breen broke it with his first and last utterance of the entire day.

"Well, I wasn't looking for anything, anyhow," he remarked philosophically; "where'd that darky put my hat?"

"*Isn't Cousin Howard too —?*" murmured Mrs. Alfred Breen, appalled by this indecent frankness.

"I want to say," said Mrs. Charlotte, calling everybody to order with a sharp glance, "that my husband, Bishop Breen, made those legacies for a special purpose. We talked about it, and I urged him to have put in the will what he wanted done with the money, so that there couldn't be any doubt or discussion about it, but he didn't seem to think that was necessary. He expected me to see that it was done. That money is to be ap-

plied to the children's education. Bishop Breen always felt that that was a very important matter — ”

“To the *children*? I have to give my money to the children, do I?” cried out Mrs. Von Donhoff in a great state of anger and alarm; “and because *you* say so!” She fanned herself vigorously. “*Voilà qui est un peu trop fort!* The children! I won't do it—it's not in the will!”

Old Charlotte turned her chilly, pale eyes on the other. “I didn't say *you* had to,” she said. “I have no desire to interfere in your affairs, which don't interest me in the least. The attorneys — ” she pointed to young Lewis with a gnarled, coarse-grained hand which, however, was a great deal steadier than Mrs. Helen's delicate and beringed one — “the attorneys will see that the money is paid over to you as soon as possible. You ought to know by this time that your brother never exacted any accounting from *you*, or laid any obligations on you.”

Poor old Helen was no match for the bishop's widow; she shrank affrightedly in her paint and gewgaws. “Well, I'm sure, Charlotte — ” she began, trembling.

“It's all right—it's all right—never mind—Helen—Charlotte—Good Lord, don't let's have any—any talk, you know!” interposed Edward, shocked at the idea of a scene, and the threatened destruction of the family dignity before outsiders like Gates and the young lawyer. “It's all right—Sylvanus's will is most generous—most just—and we all know that nobody has a better right than you, Charlotte, to—to dictate—er—to manage—to carry out Sylvanus's wishes, I mean. The ladies are a little excited, you know,” he explained to the two young men, with a tortured affability. “It's been a fatiguing day—besides being a very sad one, gentlemen.” The old man forgot his own disappointment and indignation in his desperate desire to save the family face; there was something not altogether un-

worthy in his crooked notions of *noblesse oblige*, and perhaps the others recognized it. Both the women regained their ordinary control on the instant.

"Well, it was mighty good of Uncle Syl to remember our children, anyhow," said William Breen, with warmth, and went up to the widow and took her hand; "I feel very grateful to both of you for that, Aunt Charlotte."

"I hope you understand distinctly what it's for," said the old lady, brusquely putting aside his thanks and the demonstrative gratitude of Mrs. William; "it's for their education. Mr. Lewis, I want you to fix it in some legal way so that the money can't be used for anything else."

Mr. Lewis wanted to know if they were all minors. In that case he suggested that whoever was appointed to receive and handle the money for them would be accountable to the courts for it, so that —

"Oh, account to the courts! Pretty business after it's all fribbled away! I've seen too much money go that way. This time it'll be spent properly, if I've got anything to do with it," said Mrs. Sylvanus, ruthlessly allowing it to become perfectly apparent who and what she distrusted. There was not much *noblesse oblige* about old Charlotte Breen. Strange to say, for all her sharp words, her temper and obstinacy, she was no commonplace shrew; she had what it is to be feared every one else in the family lacked, the dignity of absolute honesty and absolute disinterestedness. "The children are going to have the benefit of their inheritance, and *nobody else*." She finished pointedly with a glance around the room that comprehended and denounced every Breen in it.

"Why, Charlotte," said old Edward, red in the face, but speaking in a voice of determined moderation; "no one has any idea of opposing Sylvanus's wishes, even if they weren't so reasonable and kind. I want my grandchildren to be educated as much as you pos-

sibly can want it. There isn't any need of legal instruments."

"Yes, there is," his sister-in-law retorted with a peremptory gesture; "who's going to be Letty's guardian, for instance? I suppose William can manage for *his* children — he's worked enough to have some notion of the value of money. But who's to take care of Letty's? You know there are circumstances that make that a very important thing, Edward. It ought to be settled, in case —" she gave him another meaning look.

"Why, her mother — her mother, of course," interposed Mr. Breen, hurriedly; "she's the proper person — the *only* proper person — eh, Martha?"

Mrs. Harry Breen, who had been sitting passive all this while, in the rising storm of words, her pale face a shade paler than before, raised her head. Every one in the room looked toward her, young Lewis with a good deal of curiosity in his sharp eyes. "I'll bet that woman knows a thing or two!" he commented inwardly with solid conviction; "I'll bet she's been through the mill!"

"I will take charge of the money," said Letty's mother, with a painful effort; "but it seems to me, Mrs. Breen, that I ought to apply it to something else — to —" she looked at the older woman appealingly, and a significant glance went around the company.

"Nonsense!" said the bishop's widow, energetically; "your duty's to your child before everything and everybody else. Here she's growing up without any advantages, and in danger from all kind of low associations, such as you told me about this morning —"

"Hey?" said Mrs. Von Donhoff, pricking up her ears; then she smiled broadly, and nodded, winked, and shrugged under cover of her fan at her neighbors on either hand. She whispered; promptly other whispers arose; Tom Breen edged near her; everybody began to look interested. Letty, who had scarcely understood what was going on and knew too little about money to

care greatly about her uncle's bequest, all at once found herself in a position of unpleasant publicity. People were eying her; and in another moment, with a horrid mortification, she became aware of what they were saying — of amused glances and ejaculations — "The laundress's boy, you say — ?" "What, that homely little thing!" "Sh-h! The child will hear you —"

The child *had* heard them; the dread moment of reckoning had come! Her mother was too preoccupied with some deeper question to notice her; Letty felt as if she were alone in a world of enemies, of pitiless grown-up giants indulging themselves in hyena mirth at her expense. She was a chaos of futile anger and fear and shame. Everywhere she looked was mockery, as it seemed to her. Cousin Augustus, scenting entertainment, elevated his trumpet; Uncle Tom winked maliciously; Mr. Gates shook his finger, and said in facetious reproach: "Oh, Plaid Party, how *could* you! Oh, you dangerous plaid siren!" Only the young lawyer, whom nobody would have taken for a particularly sympathetic person, appeared not to relish the scene. "Oh, don't bait the poor little devil, Web!" he said in an impatient and rather contemptuous aside to Gates, and, getting up, began to look about for his hat and cane.

"She ought to be sent away to a girls' boarding-school — a convent would be a good place — the Ursulines in Greene County, for instance," Mrs Sylvanus went on loudly and authoritatively; "she wouldn't be allowed to see any boys there —"

Young Gates exploded in open laughter; he rocked about helplessly. "Oh, Aunt Charlotte! A convent! That's coming it a little *too* strong!"

"Really, Charlotte, that is a pretty high-handed measure, if you'll overlook my saying so," said Mr. Breen, annoyed. "I think either her mother or myself is fully competent to — ah — to choose a school for Letty,

and I don't know that I approve of convents, or that the — the occasion justifies it, in short."

"Why, everybody in France goes to a convent, Edward; it's very much the thing there," protested Mrs. Helen. "I think Charlotte is perfectly right!"

"Well, it's not worrying me any one way or the other," said Tom Breen, liberally. "But, say, Will —" he addressed his brother in a low voice — "I'd just like to talk to you about something a minute — I'd like to show you a few figures. You could double that money if —" he drew the other aside, discoursing earnestly.

"What you think is a matter of indifference to me," said Mrs. Charlotte, replying to Mrs. Helen in her hard voice, which had the quality of producing a silence whenever she exerted it. "It seems, Edward, you were not *competent*, as you call it, to keep Letty from starting a low intrigue with some street boy from the gutter. Twelve years is entirely too young, according to my notion, for a little girl to begin that sort of thing. And what is more," added the old woman, looking over the roomful of Breens with a sudden rancor, "I'll remind you that there is a very bad precedent in this family for it."

It was a bombshell; awful silence ensued, in the midst of which old Edward Breen rose, shaking. "That's enough!" he said, and, for once, even the bishop's wife shrank a little at his tone. "Have your way about this miserable money, or what you choose, Charlotte. It is your right. But I think that reference might very well have been spared in my presence and over Sylvanus's grave." He repented of the speech almost as soon as it was uttered, feeling himself to have been guilty of cheap melodrama, bad taste, banality. And before strangers at that! "I — beg your pardon, Charlotte," he broke off, hurriedly and humbly, with a shamed attempt at a smile; "I spoke heatedly — without reflection. A moment of temper — I beg your par-

don. We have all been tried very much by this sad event."

"Oh, la, la, la, he's spoiled all!" said Mrs. Von Donhoff to herself, in exasperation; "and what a *coup*! With his white hair and that grand manner—what an effect if only he could have held his pose! But one couldn't expect that of Edward," she thought resignedly. Cousin Augustus here intervened by attacking Mr. Lewis, trumpet in hand, just as the latter was about to leave. "I didn't catch exactly all you read, or what they were all saying," he explained in what he erroneously supposed to be a whisper; "I'm a little hard of hearing. How much of an estate did Bishop Breen leave? I expect it was considerable, for I've understood his wife never let him spend much. Between you and me, young man, she's always worn the breeches!"

CHAPTER VII

THE office day was so broken into by the hour young Mr. Gates and young Mr. Lewis left the Breen family gathering, their business with it being concluded for the time, at least, that neither one thought of work for the rest of the afternoon. Instead, they walked meditatively away in the direction of their club, dreadful to relate! And, arrived there, sat down still meditatively — indeed, they had scarcely exchanged a word during this idle journey — at a quiet table in the corner of the large room which was quite empty for a while, and ordered a drink apiece, and sipped in silent harmony, looking out on the elms and sparrows and dry, dusty grass of the club-house yard.

"You look tired, Web," Archer said at length, casually.

"I am, a little," the other admitted with reluctance. He was not a strong man physically, as all his friends knew; and having been obliged to spend an irksome care on his health for the last ten years or so since coming of age, had grown to dislike, even to resent, anything like a reference to the subject, however remote. "Anybody'd be tired with arranging for a funeral in all this heat. I've had several days of it, you know."

"Yes. You were there when the old gentleman died, weren't you? Your aunt going back East soon?"

"In a day or two." And after another interval of silence, he added: "That is, she expected to. But I believe now she's going to wait to see General Burke. She's got an idea that he can fix up some wrought-steel, hand-hammered, boiler-riveted legal arrangement by

which those little bequests to the Breen children can't be diverted — misappropriated — embezzled — whatever you choose to call it. She hasn't any confidence in *you*."

Young Lewis looked up with a quick twitch at the corner of his strong, humorous mouth. "No confidence in *me*?" he said; "why, I'm not a marker to her own family! She wouldn't trust one of *them* round the corner!"

"You mean the Breens? They aren't her family — they're the bishop's family. They aren't any relation to me, you know," said Gates. He removed his cigar, and eyed it with that appearance of having suddenly discovered something of surpassing interest about it, which gentlemen who smoke sometimes assume. "I suppose," he said rather irrelevantly; "I suppose you often see a lot of squabbling among the heirs when somebody dies and the estate comes to be settled up, don't you?"

"No, you don't see it *often* — you see it *always*," said the young lawyer, with a laugh. "Rarest thing in the world for people to get through amicably with everybody satisfied."

"That's a little sad, I think — a little dingy, somehow."

"Oh, no — it's human nature. You get used to it. People are pretty good to each other in the main, you know — people want to do what's right."

Gates looked pensively at his cigar again. "Well, I don't mind saying to you, Arch, that I can't blame my aunt for not trusting the Breens — " he paused.

"Kind of a job-lot, hey?" suggested Lewis. "But what a fine-looking old fellow that old Mr. Edward Breen is! They were all more or less good-looking, I thought, for that matter, except that one with the glasses — what's his name? His children got some of the money."

"That's Will — William Breen. Well, yes, *he* isn't much on looks. William's chief claim to distinction," said Mr. Gates with a half smile, "is that he's the only one in the whole connection that's ever done a lick of work, or supported himself and his family. He's got some job in a railroad office somewhere."

The other stared. "Why, don't any of the rest do *anything*? The men, I mean — how do they all live?"

"Most of 'em *did* live by sponging on the bishop," said Gates, dryly; "I don't know what they'll do now."

Mr. Lewis accepted this information, after a moment, with a subtle grin of comprehension. "I *see*!" he remarked. And after another interval of silence: "But what kind of a man was Bishop Breen, then? He must have been a good deal different from the rest."

"Uncle Syl was a mighty good man — a mighty fine old gentleman," said the other, warmly. "He was as generous to all those lame ducks and crooked sticks — as generous as the day was long. Why, Arch, the very last thing he did in his life was to send money to that worthless old brother of his — Edward, you know. He had written the bishop a begging letter — we found it afterwards. When Uncle Sylvanus had the stroke, he was sitting at his desk writing an answer to it. Aunt Charlotte found him. I had gone out somewhere. She and the servants got him to bed somehow, and by the time I got back he had revived enough to show he understood when they spoke to him. I was sitting up with him that night alone, when he beckoned with his left hand — he was paralyzed all down one side, of course. I went to the bed and said: 'What is it? Do you want Aunt Charlotte?' He made a tremendous effort, and I'm sure he was in pain, but he finally made me understand that I was to finish the letter, and send Edward the money; he drew the figures on the counterpane with his poor trembling old left hand.

And I was to tell Edward he needn't mind about paying, and to give him his love —"

"By Jove!" said the other young fellow, touched; "by Jove!"

"Yes — and he knew he was dying, Arch. I did what he told me, and read the letter to him afterwards, and he seemed to be satisfied. That was the last he ever said — the last notice he ever took of anybody."

"That was pretty hard on your aunt, I guess," said Archer, shrewdly; "I shouldn't wonder if she kind of laid that up against the family along with the rest of their failings."

"Well, yes — why not?" retorted the other; "I tell you, you can't blame her, in conscience. She knows very well the Breens think it's outrageous for the bishop to have left his money to her; she's a rich woman as it is. But leaving it to them — to any one of them — would have been pouring water into sand. That's the reason he didn't do it; he thought he was giving them enough as he went along. And Aunt Charlotte's a good woman, you don't want to make any mistake about that," he went on, somewhat defiantly. "She got the bishop to put in those codicils. She thought that was only right. The reason she's so short with them all is that she simply hasn't any patience with shiftlessness and laziness. You can't blame her."

The lawyer nodded, looking down. What he was thinking was: "Webster Gates will probably inherit every cent of his aunt's property — that's what everybody says. He's talking himself around to thinking it's all right. Lord, how funny people are!" But what he said aloud was: "Mrs. Von Donhoff's a great old bird, isn't she? She and the ladies of your family seem to be at daggers drawn."

Young Gates began to laugh: "They were funny, weren't they? The fact is, Mrs. Riggins and my aunt — you know how hard women are on one another — they

think Mrs. Von Donhoff isn't just — you understand — any better than she ought to be, not to put too fine a point on it."

The two young men looked at each other squarely.

"Well, *is* she?" asked Lewis.

"Give it up — *I* don't know. You can judge for yourself. I like to be on the side of charity myself," said the other, with a fine detachment. "She's led all kinds of a life. She was one of the first of the international marriages — married a German army officer who was a sort of a gentleman blackguard — the kind they have over there, you know. They ran through all her money, and he got himself kicked out of the army and the clubs for cheating, and then I believe he turned regular card-shark. Travelled up and down everywhere, looking for suckers —"

"And finding 'em," interjected his companion, contemptuously.

"Yes, oh, yes, finding 'em, of course, and fleeing 'em. I guess old Helen — that's her name — helped him. Can't say; maybe she did a little adventuring on her own hook. The whole thing was scandalous from my aunt's point of view —"

"From anybody's point of view, I should say."

"Yes, it was pretty bad. Finally, Von Donhoff died over there in Paris ten or fifteen years ago. Nobody knows how his wife's lived since, barring what she held up the bishop for. Nobody knows and better not ask. Then here two or three months ago she suddenly announced that she was coming 'home,' as she put it, with a great deal of sentiment, and I believe her idea was that she was going to live with her dear brother Sylvanus, to whom she had always been so devotedly attached, don't you know! She did come down to Washington right after she landed on this side; but after a few days of her in the house, there was a terrific ruction. My aunt told me about it — she was furious. I don't know what it

was all about — you can guess, though. Even the old Von Donhoff had the grace to keep it from Uncle Syl — he was in bad health at the time. Oh, I want to be just; Aunt Charlotte was probably quite as much to blame as the other woman —”

“They don’t look exactly cut out to get along together,” said Archer, amused.

“They certainly don’t. Even if Mrs. Von D.’s all right — and I daresay the poor old thing is — her looks are against her. Too much paint and make-up for a bishop’s household, you know. Anyhow, the upshot of it was that she got some money of Uncle Sylvanus, and went off to her other brother — that’s old Mr. Edward Breen. He’s the father of this set of Breens out here, William and Tom and Harry.”

“Tom looked to me like a pretty bad bill, too,” said Lewis.

“Well, I don’t know whether he’s really a scoundrel, or just plain fool. I don’t know any of them very well. I’ve got most of this from my aunt, and of course she’s very severe on all the family. Harry Breen *was* a scoundrel, at any rate, no doubt about *him*.”

“Who’s Harry?” Lewis said, swallowing a yawn. He glanced around the room, which was beginning to fill up now, and nodded to an acquaintance or two as they came in.

“Another son of Edward’s — the father of that funny little girl they were making such a fuss about, don’t you remember?”

“Oh.”

“Am I boring you, Arch? I didn’t mean to,” said Gates, quickly, the color coming into his face. “I’ve been talking Breen, sleeping Breen, hearing Breen for days — I’ve got Breen on the brain,” he apologized with a laugh.

“No, no, I’m not bored — it’s interesting. They’re such a queer lot,” protested the other, rousing himself

to a show of closer attention. "Harry Breen was an out-and-outer, you say, a real live scoundrel?"

"Yes. He had a government position, and got away with some funds, Aunt Charlotte told me. They fixed it up somehow; Bishop Breen went to the President, who was a personal friend — it was in Grant's last administration, I believe — and fixed it up, or there'd have been a perfectly devastating scandal."

"That youngish-looking Mrs. Breen is his widow, isn't she? I *thought* she looked as if she had a history," said Archer, with genuine interest this time. He was pleased at his own penetration. "She seemed so different from the rest. And say, Webster, what was it all about when the old gentleman got up and launched the curse of Rome at your aunt? What had the old wom — er — that is, what had Mrs. Sylvanus Breen said? Everybody looked scared to death."

Young Gates smiled, not without a touch of contempt or superiority. "Oh, *that!*" he said; "why, that was a reference to the cherished old family disgrace. Old Mr. Breen's mother, the late Mrs. Erasmus Breen, whose career was rather open to derogatory comment, between you and me."

"Didn't your aunt use to get on with Mama-in-law? How very unusual and remarkable!"

"No, it wasn't that. You see Erasmus was the father of 'em all — the old original he-Breen. But he had a rumpus with his wife, and they didn't live together for years; they separated when the children were babies, I believe, and Erasmus got the custody of 'em — isn't that what you call it? It seems Mrs. Erasmus was a dreadful, gay, frivolous, flirtatious person; she misbehaved with somebody at last, and Erasmus found it out. It's as much as your life's worth to mention her before any of the family."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the young lawyer in astonishment and impatience; "why, it must be a life-

time since it happened, isn't it? Nobody'd care a hooter if the whole story was shouted from the rooftops nowadays."

"Well, the Breens would. And you know it was old Mr. Edward's own mother — the bishop's own mother. That brings it awfully near, somehow."

"Yes, that's so, too," Lewis assented; and looked around the room again. But it was evident that his companion could not easily dismiss the subject from his mind; he spoke again, frowningly, half to himself, over his cigar and his empty glass.

"I haven't been particularly gracious or complimentary to any of the family, I'm afraid. But it's all so, anyhow. I say, Arch, if anybody believed in heredity—"

"I don't," said the friend, briefly.

"Well, but if anybody *did* believe in heredity, they'd think those little Breen youngsters — that little Letty Breen, for instance — they'd think those children didn't have much of a show, wouldn't they? With such an inheritance, I mean — such a string of ancestral influences, hey?"

About the same time, the sorrowing relatives were returning to their several homes, having said good-by to one another, and to that grim old Gorgon of a Mrs. Sylvanus with an appropriate sad unction. Thomas Breen went back to his large financial operations in Cleveland, Chicago, the West; William took himself and Mrs. William off to Cincinnati; Cousin Augustus, Cousin Howard, disappeared Heaven knew where; and old Mr. Edward Breen withdrew to Muskingum Street and the soap factory and the problem of satisfying the butcher and the baker, from which he had confidently hoped to be emancipated. Who can say what heroic effort he had made to keep his disappointment decently hid, to wear a gentleman's air of indifference and com-

posure at this shabby anticlimax? Half as much resolution employed in the conduct of his affairs would have made a successful man of Edward! Even in the intimacy of his own family circle, this misdirected pride governed him; he listened with a very cold and reproving manner to the lively criticism of his sister, who, for her part, once she was safely beyond the widow's basilisk eye, was quite loud in righteous indignation.

"It's an abominable injustice," cried out Mrs. Helen, fanning furiously; "Sylvanus was completely under that woman's thumb, or he never would have done it in the world! Eh, the poor good man's life was not of the most agreeable, I can assure you. But he was too upright and too much attached to his family for *this*. He must have known he was robbing us of our birth-right — that's what it was, *robbing* us of our mess of *pottage*, like Esau — or Jacob, I forget which —"

"Sylvanus had a perfect right to do what he chose with his own, Helen," said her brother, severely; "if he chose to leave it to his wife, we can have nothing to say. And we must remember that the family were not entirely forgotten."

"Oh, la, la!" said Mrs. Helen, flirting this suggestion away with contempt; "of course his wife knew she had to allow us *something* for the sake of appearances. Fifteen hundred dollars — what kindness! What generosity! And she with her millions! But some people never have enough. When do you think I'll get my pittance, Edward?" she added with a sudden anxiety; "one never likes to think of one's money left too long in a lawyer's hands. And that young man with the screw-driver eyes — ! Oh, I know a good little bit about rogues — I have seen the world — !" which was probably quite true.

This wise uneasiness turned out to be unnecessary, however; Mr. Lewis proved himself an honest and capable man of business, screw-driver eyes to the contrary

notwithstanding, and in a surprisingly short time Mrs. Von Donhoff was in full possession of her "pittance," and beginning to display certain signs of restlessness, and a disposition to seek other scenes. The town was delightful, Muskingum Street a paradise; she hardly knew how she could separate herself from the best of brothers, from that dear little Letty, from her amiable hostess; but she dreaded the winter of this Northern climate which she had never been able to endure — besides, *mon Dieu*, had she not almost worn out her welcome with them already? And she suddenly remembered or discovered a dear friend living in New Orleans, whom she was overpoweringly anxious to see again. "Madame Lafour — Désirée Lafour, the most charming woman! We were together a whole year in Stockholm, and became devoted friends. The widow of a captain in the French Navy — poor, if you will, but what of that? So am I poor, but I show what I *am*, I hope," said Mrs. Helen, devoutly; "*bon sang ne peut mentir*, isn't it so? Now Désirée is in New Orleans; what a chance! She is living in the French Quarter, of course — she couldn't exist elsewhere, the French are so patriotic, you know. She will be wild to see me. *Enfin*, one does one's duty, as one sees it — I must go."

And go she did, finally, not long after, very much as she had come, in another jingling hack, with the trunk and valise piled on top; and she herself smiling and blowing kisses and assurances of return to the family, and the street, which unanimously deserted its wash-tubs and its play in the gutters to witness her departure. "*Ouf!* What a place! What a release!" she exclaimed to herself with a breath of immeasurable relief as her chariot jingled its way out of sight; and fell to contemplating a roseate New Orleans where fifteen hundred dollars was to last for months — years — forever!

Perhaps the Muskingum Street household did not

regret the separation much more than their late guest; old Edward knew when he was being made a convenience of, even if his dignity would not allow of his admitting it to himself. Only little Letty rather missed her servitude, and for a while could not go into her aunt's room — which her mother and 'Lizabeth, between them, lost no time in restoring to its original neatness, whisking about with brooms and pails and towelled heads and clearing out all old Helen's scented rubbish unrelentingly — without a pang of lonesomeness. But all that was presently banished from her mind by the news that she herself was to go away — to go away to boarding-school at that convent in Greene County which she shudderingly remembered to have heard mentioned during those few hideous moments when she had been up before the family bar. There were letters and prospectuses with the course of study and recommendations for the pupil's equipment meticulously set forth. She was asked if she would like to have lessons in French; and, for the first time in her life, was taken to a milliner's! Her mother went about these preparations with animation, almost with gayety; there was a color in her ordinarily pallid cheeks, and she hummed little tunes over her hemstitching. Apparently it occurred to nobody in the household, certainly not to the child herself, to go into any sentimental demonstrations over the approaching change; tendencies of that nature had been too consistently frowned down, and Letty would have learned with surprise, perhaps even some scorn, that other little girls not infrequently parted from their mothers on like occasions with bitter wailings and homesickness. Not knowing any other little girls, she was all agog to meet them, and had no thought of tears, which, at any rate, she would have sternly repressed, according to the creed of her upbringing.

It even happened that she all but forgot our dashing acquaintance, Mr. James Hatfield, though he was one

of the indirect causes of all this change and pleasurable excitement, or thought of him only with a kind of dislike. Letty noted indifferently that their laundress had disappeared, and been replaced by a colored woman; but as no further notice was taken of her late adventure, she was glad enough to let it go out of her own mind. The evening before her departure, when her new little trunk was standing strapped in the hall, and her new coat and gloves and boots lay together on the chair by the bed with her new hat beside them, — it was a tight, round little turban with a band and buckle and a bird's wing at the side in the fashion of the day, — while all these glories were lying displayed, and when she could finally tear herself from the view of them, Letty went out into the yard, wandering about in a creditable effort to subdue the commotion within her which otherwise might find vent in unbecoming squealings and jumpings; and, coming near the old summer-house, heard her name called in a cautious voice which she recognized with a start and a definite vexation. "There, now he's beginning it all over again!" she thought, in alarm and resentment. As if he hadn't made her enough bother already! Nevertheless, she went slowly toward the place; oddly enough, in this act, which was one of submission, she felt a sense of power. She had on one of the new dresses, with a scarlet ribbon in her hair, which looked very dense and black around her narrow pale face. She was not averse to letting him see her in this unwonted brilliancy of attire.

It produced no visible effect, however. "Huh!" Jim said, glowering at her from a corner of the pavillion. He himself was as unkempt as ever; his face was dirty, and, moreover, it was swollen and discolored by a high red weal running across his forehead and down on one cheek; as he faced her he kept shifting one shoulder under his dirty shirt, as if to ease it. All the vaguely imaged ugliness of the slums was for the moment em-

bodied in him, and the little girl, brought up in a shallow, fastidious religion of birth and blood, shrank physically and mentally. "What do you want?" she said, with haughtiness.

The boy glared again. They might have been two mortal enemies for all the greeting would have betrayed. "Wanted to see you agin — what'd you think?" he said, almost savagely, and hitched his shoulder. They eyed each other. "I don' wanter make you any more trouble, though," said Jim, at last, in a sombre tone; "I'll go if you say so. I was goin' in a minute, anyhow. I jest wanted to see you agin." He made a motion of retreat. "I'll go if you say so, Letty."

Something about the humility of this Caliban moved Letty. She was going away, so nothing much could come of it anyhow, she reflected; besides, his manner roused her curiosity. She remembered with a certain thrill the moment of their last meeting which 'Lizbeth had interrupted. "What did you want to see me for?" she asked experimentally.

"Wanted to say good-by."

"Why, how did you know I was going away?" said the girl, taken by surprise. But Jim's face mirrored the same feeling.

"I didn't. I didn't know *you* was goin' away, too," he said. "It was becuz I'm goin' myself. Where you goin'? Is it fer good?"

Letty told him, and he listened in a glum silence, looking down, moving his shoulder uneasily.

"Are they sending *you* to school, too?" she finished civilly, yet conscious all the while that nothing could be more unlikely; the youngster was precocious in her own queer ways.

"Naw," said Jim, scowling down at the ground, and his own battered bare feet; "naw, they wouldn't send me to no boardin'-school, ner I wouldn't go, neither. They dunno I'm goin'."

"Oh-h, are you running away?" said Letty, really impressed.

He nodded. "Ye see, Mam, she lost her job washin'. Yer gran'paw he turned her off, an' she ain't got no more work since. 'N' she up 'n' tol' Pap she got turned off becuz of — of me comin' erroun' you, you know, Letty. 'N' then Pap, he got mad, an' took 'n' belted me over the head with the fire-shovel, 'n' I tried to git away, an' then he licked me good. So I guess I jest won't go back home no more; I guess I'll git out," he explained quite unemotionally. He had no idea of enlisting her sympathy, his own rôle in this sordid domestic drama not having been over-heroic; and told the tale as briefly and succinctly as possible not to leave out any essential detail. "They didn't lick you when they found out — when that there ol' Mis' Hurd told on us, did they, Letty?" he asked her anxiously.

"No, oh, my, no!" said Letty, again ineffably repelled; "they wouldn't do *that*, you know. They aren't like that."

"I reckoned they wouldn't," said the boy, simply. They stood a long minute silent. "Well — good-by," Jim said at length, huskily.

"Good-by," said Letty, avoiding his eyes. Neither one of them moved.

"Say, Letty —" and now he drew a step nearer; "— Letty, will you now — *you* know —?"

"No, *no*, you *can't*!" said the girl with immense decision, yet not retreating. At heart, she was as infirm as water; to save her life she could not have decided whether she wanted him to kiss her or not.

"Oh, I know *you* don't care — not the way I do, that is," said the boy, roughly; "I'm doin' all the carin' — I know that. I c'd *make* you — but 'twouldn't be — 'twouldn't be any good, somehow, 's long as you don't *care*. Good-by, Letty," and turned from her, twitching his lame shoulder.

Perhaps that involuntary gesture pleaded for him — who, that understands the workings of the feminine heart, will enlighten us? All at once, a smothering wave of pity swept over the girl; it was true that she did not care for him; in that she perceived a great, almost an unfair, advantage. But he had been belted over the head with a fire-shovel, and licked until he ached because of her; it seemed as if the least she could do would be to pretend to care; if it did him any good — if it made him feel a little better — and it couldn't hurt *her*.

"Jim!" she said in a soft voice, and ran to him.

The boy was only a boy, but there was something of real passion in his embrace; Letty was unprepared for so much vehemence, and frightened, and pulled herself violently away in a sudden overwhelming shame and repugnance. He let her slip from his arms awkwardly, looked at her a second, then retreated into the thickening twilight among the bushes. Letty heard him scramble over the wall, and drop down the other side with a slight jar and grunt, and the rattle of a dry cascade of mortar.

BOOK SECOND: MRS. HARRY BREEN

CHAPTER I

WHEN the last century — a phrase which still wears a certain oddity to middle-aged eyes — was doddering to its end, — to wit, about the year 1890, — there was inaugurated in the social circles of the Middle West, and perhaps elsewhere, the fashion and habit of auction-room visiting. Young married women greatly affected it; you were supposed to “pick up” pictures, furniture, china, metal ware, household gimcrackery of every class, and the most desirable style for next to nothing. Treasures of art and antiquity went begging, or were inexorably knocked down to the highest bidder at terms which one might have thought would leave the auctioneer and his associates no resource but to come on the county, so desperate must be their prospects of making a living out of the enterprise. This chief functionary was always a large, well-built, carefully dressed gentleman with a strong and flexible mouth, a humorous intonation, and a particularly quick eye; he paced up and down upon an elevated dais above the multitude, whence he exhorted, reminded, pointed out, cut jokes, and issued orders — “Jim, take that vase to the lady in the third row back — *One* moment, sir! — Solid panna-jambia-wood, madame, the top and sides hand-carved, as you see — Yes, the entire set for a little more than the cost of half-a-dozen! Hey? Well, the things *have* to be sold, you know; that’s what I’m here for, ladies — Turn on the light over the cut glass, Sol — !” All the minions, perspiring in their shirt-sleeves, sprang fever-

ishly to obey him; he never lost his temper; he seldom descended to argument; he presided with an Olympian serenity. Was there ever any man less mercenary or more disinterested? What has become of him, I wonder? It is only twenty years; has he run his course and become obsolete? I am not by way of knowing nowadays, Japanese bowls and plaster busts of Dante and gilded mirrors having lost their charm for me — even at bed-rock prices! But on a pleasant morning of that by-gone date, at Messrs. Levi & Bernstein's Auction & Salesrooms on South High Street in the capital city, he or his twin was very busy with a rather interesting collection of household goods, and his assistants were hustling about with their customary zeal, and there was an audience not perhaps so large as it might have been, but composed, as Mr. Levi, after a careful scrutiny at long range from the small office in the rear, informed his partner, of all the high rollers in town.

"It's a dead swell crowd, Leo," he said; "the old gent wasn't any two-spot himself, y'know. He used to come here, too, once in a while; I remember selling him a whole line of dinky little books that come out of the liberry of some old geezer over in Chillicothe or Lancaster — ninety-eight cents he gave apiece for 'em — old books with the covers dropping off!"

"Gee, he must have been fond of reading!" observes Mr. Bernstein, energetically employing a toothpick.

"It wasn't that. I don't guess he wanted 'em to read at all — he was paying for the date on 'em, 1740, or something like that; he said they was first editions, curiosities, y'know. I take notice by the papers with the probate in, that he left all his books to this here, now what d'ye call it? — this here State Historical S'ciety, so we ain't going to get to sell them again," says Mr. Levi, with regret; "these folks have likely come to bid on some of the other stuff — brickybrack

and etcetrers. It's a kind of *fad*, like they say, of the — the Four Hundred, y'know."

"Well, their money don't spend any better than anybody else's money — it all looks alike to me," says the partner, unimpressed; and both gentlemen return to their desks and their preparations for the coming busy hours. Outside the auctioneer has already mounted his rostrum; he holds a low-voiced conference with some important-looking lieutenant, shaking his head or nodding it sagely from time to time. The room begins to fill up; a very well-dressed lady in one of the front seats, after confidential murmurs with an equally well-dressed friend, rustles up to the desk, coloring uncomfortably, but self-possessed under the eyes of the crowd, and wants to know in an undertone if he can't please put up that fire-screen and the girandoles *first*? Eh? Oh, that's lot No. 14 — awfully sorry, madame, if she'd just asked him five minutes ago! He'll get to them as soon as possible, however — depends on how the things go off. And as she retreats, smiling a little grimace of discomfiture at her friend:—

"Ladies and gentlemen!" says the auctioneer, clearing his throat, and addressing his look and his sonorous speech to the assembly at large; "I am now about to offer for sale a large and careful selection from the effects of the well-known connoisseur and man of wealth, the late Doctor John Vardaman of your city, who, I've no doubt, a good many of you were acquainted with. The first article I would like to call your attention to is a genuine antique Wedgewood tea-set consisting of tea-pot, sugar bowl, creamer, and eleven cups and saucers, in a perfect state of preservation, with a decoration of white figgers from the celebrated Flaxman drawings, on a blue ground set in as medallions framed in ornamental metal-work. This style of decoration, I need not say, ladies and gentlemen, marks the extreme antiquity of these specimens, as it belongs to the earli-

est period of — er — of Wedgewood production. Hey? Yes, the decorated Japanned tray is also very old and belongs with this lot. Now then, what am I offered for this very rare and beautiful — five dollars? Five dollars — five and a half — six —”

They are knocked down at last for twelve-seventy-five to a tall, thin, sandy-haired man bidding from the back of the room, where are congregated a number of others who have plainly dropped in on the way to or from their various places of business; and look on and listen with their half-smoked cigars, amused and critical. “What on earth does Gwynne Peters want with that crockery?” one asks.

“Search me!” says another, frivolously, in the fresh slang of 1890. But Mr. Peters, hearing his own name, looks around in a little confusion with a rather shame-faced grin.

“Auld lang syne,” he explains; “I used to have tea-parties with ’em in the doctor’s garden when I was a little chap. There were a dozen of those cups, but I broke one myself. I didn’t expect to buy anything when I came in. Are you bidding, Arch?”

“Why, I don’t know. There’s a set of old Bartolozzi engravings, the ‘Four Seasons,’ don’t you remember? They used to hang in the dining-room, two on a side. I thought I’d make a bid, if this fellow ever gets around to ’em,” says Mr. Lewis. He is a trifle heavier set than when we first met him, with a bare spot about the size of a dollar at the crown of his head; but otherwise not much changed, with the same sharp eyes, and strong, blue, clean-shaved under jaw. “It makes me feel kind of badly to see all the old doctor’s things broken up and scattered this way —” he adds thoughtfully.

“That’s so!” all the others agree, with gravity, and some sober wagging of heads; and somebody remarks that it’s a pity how fast all the nice old fellows like him seem to be dropping off this last year or so!

More people came in ; the sale progressed ; and there went off in succession a fine old Sheffield tankard, a set of a bronze clock and pendant bronze lamps with prisms, and lot No. 14 — with which the lady retired victorious and looking very pretty and excited. About the next offering some difficulty arose — “a Mexican blanket, a pair of silver spurs, and Mexican water jug of a beautiful classic design, constituting lot No. 24, ladies and gentlemen. Absolutely genuine relics presented to Doctor Vardaman by the late General Burke on his return from the Mexican War — hey? Oh — ah — wait a minute, Sam — !” And after a whispered consultation with Mr. Levi and some reference to a note-book in the latter’s hands, the auctioneer announced regretfully that there had been an error — lot No. 24 must be withdrawn from sale.

“I *thought* that was a mistake,” said Peters to Lewis in the background. “The doctor left all the things like that to Mrs. Jimmie Burke, for her little boy and girl.”

The other nodded absently and looked at his watch. “Eleven-thirty — I guess I can’t wait any longer. Only I hate to miss those ‘Seasons’ —” and here his gaze, moving alertly about, fell on a young man — a nice, fresh-faced, blond young man — standing by with folded arms — “Oh, here, Dodsley, are you bidding?”

“For myself, Mr. Lewis? Not much!” said the young man ; he was about twenty-six or seven, with an eager, pleasant, anxious expression, and he grinned and blushed when the other spoke to him. “I’m here for Mr. Gates. He telegraphed back from New York — you know he sailed yesterday — that he wanted one of Doctor Vardaman’s pictures, so they sent *me* up. I guess maybe you’ll know which one it is better than me.” He pulled out the bit of yellow paper. “‘Female pink dress signed E. B. Biob. D.W.G.’”

“That last means there ain’t any limit, you know.

He says it's his cipher code : B-I-O-B, Buy it or bust !” said the young fellow, chuckling. “I'm to bid till I get it, no difference how much.”

“That's like Web, isn't it ?” Peters said, and read the telegram with a laugh. “*Biob!* When he wants a thing, he *wants* it.”

“Well, no reason why he shouldn't *have* what he wants — he's got the price,” said Lewis. “I remember his enthusing over that picture. The doctor picked it up at some second-hand store in New York or Baltimore when he was East one summer ; he was always mousing 'round places like that — he must have bought dozens of pictures first and last —”

“Well, I don't want to make any mistake,” said young Dodsley, perturbed ; his fresh face clouded instantly with a look of worry out of all proportion to the cause ; he fingered the telegram nervously. “I — I — why, it would be pretty bad, you know, if I went to work bidding on the wrong thing — Mr. Gates's money — I — I —” he wiped his forehead ; there was a look of something like fright in his nice, open, blue eyes. “What do you think I'd better do, Mr. Lewis — ?”

“You can't miss it,” interrupted the older man, with a kind of good-humored impatience ; “there isn't any other like it. It's an oil-painting of a woman in a low-necked dress, life-size ; it's taken about down to her knees, you know — she's sitting down with a music-rack or something like that in front of her. In an old-fashioned gilt frame with roses on it, bunches of gilt roses — you can't miss it. But look here, Jack, so long as you've got to stay anyhow, I wish you'd keep an eye out for some little kind-of tinted engravings —” he went on with a description of the Bartolozzis, and instructions for their purchase, to which the other listened with many comprehending and affirmative movements of the head. “All right, Mr. Lewis — yes, sir,

— I understand —” he repeated two or three times, eager and obliging, and not without a certain deference.

Mr. Lewis was in the very act and article of departure, when at the door he collided with a little group of a short, round, solid lady in a striped costume and high-crowned billy-cock hat with a tall, piratical, or chivalric feather up the side — in the kind of dress, briefly, which short, stout ladies invariably assume to gain an appearance of height and slimness — trundling in front of her a thin, spindle-shanked child in skirts and long curls, with another younger lady bringing up the rear. The lawyer took off his hat and stood aside with some word of apology. “Oh, my ! I *beg* your pardon !” ejaculated the short lady ; she mopped off her face and beamed upon him. “It’s awfully hard getting around in such a crowd, isn’t it ? And when you’ve got a little one along, too. Teentsie,” she addressed the little girl — “tell the gentleman you’re sorry you ran into him. What ? Oh, now, you’re not afraid of *him* — he’s nice — he’s a nice gentleman. Come now, tell him you’re sorry —”

“All right — never mind, little miss,” said Archer, kindly, if a little hurriedly ; he had children of his own at home. He was edging off, when the lady arrested him with a gesture and a half-stifled shriek of surprise.

“*Mr. Lewis ! It is Mr. Lewis, isn’t it ? Well, of all things ! I thought your face looked familiar when you took your hat off — and now I remember just as well ! Of all things !*” She planted herself squarely in front of him, with an arch and playfully mysterious air. “Now tell me who *I* am !” she commanded ; “you ought to know, Mr. Lewis. Don’t you say you don’t know. You *know* you ought to know. Now tell me who I am, or I may never speak to you again !”

“Why — I — I —” stammered the unlucky gentleman. “I’m sorry — I remember your *face* perfectly — I couldn’t forget *that* very well, you know,” said

Archer, making a noble effort; "but I must own up I can't recall —"

"Oh, now, Mr. Lewis, what kind of a lawyer's way is that to do? Why, I'm just ashamed of you!" said the lady, in gay rebuke; "why, you've *written* to me — and sent *money*, there! Or to my husband, it's the same thing. *Now* don't you remember? I'm Mrs. Will Breen — *now* don't you remember?"

"Oh — why, of course!" said Lewis, grasping the hand she extended to him and shaking it warmly up and down, the while he rummaged his memory; "we must have met at the time Bishop Breen's estate was settled up — that's quite a while ago, six or eight years, isn't it? You can't blame me, Mrs. Breen — I would have expected you to look older." ["Pretty good for you, Archer, old man!" he added to himself, with ribaldry.] "I didn't know you were living here," he said aloud fluently, various details gradually returning to him; "I thought your home was in Cin —"

"Why, it was till last September, Tump — my husband, that is, was moved here. He was fourteen years in that old Cincinnati office, and it was about *time*, I think. He's G.F.S. now, Mr. Lewis," said Mrs. Tump, proudly; "so of course we had to come here to live. This is the central office, you see."

"G.F.S.," echoed Lewis, automatically, and feeling covertly for his watch again; "well — er — I hope to see —"

"Yes, he was only F.S. for our division before, and I believe if it hadn't been for me fairly *pushing* him on to *demand* what he was worth — why, Mr. Lewis, he was doing the work of three men down there! — he'd have stayed till his dying day!" said Mrs. Breen, fixing the other with her honest, kind, happy eyes; she was as innocently self-centred as a child. "Nobody can have any *idea* how modest Will Breen is. He won't even ask for a vacation, unless I say to him,

'Now, dearie, I think it's time you took a rest.' Once he just wouldn't ask, and I wrote a note to the president of the Road and just told him my husband was all run down and ought to have two weeks in the country. It made Will just as *mad* — but he's asked ever since —"

"Ah — and so you're living here? Well, this has been very pleasant, Mrs. Breen — I hope we shall see —" began Lewis, desperately, once more.

"Yes, we've just taken a house — the cutest place, eight rooms and a bath and perfectly splendid closets, on State, near Oak — one of those bricks, two stories with an attic, with three windows across the front. For a while we boarded — with Mrs. Dodsley, you know, on the corner of Long and Fourth; she was lovely and the best table; but I don't know — I don't think it's a good plan to board with children. Children ought to be in their own home, and we've got three, you know. Of course, Bubba and Tee are at school nearly all day, and every one of the boarders just *loved* Teentsie — still, I thought we'd better take a house this spring. And then, too, I wanted to have Lets visit us. You remember Lets, don't you, Mr. Lewis?" And that gentleman, looking in the direction she indicated, beheld the young woman who had entered, as he now remembered, at the same time; and who now advanced diffidently, and held out her hand.

"I'm Miss Breen," she said in a manner at once frigid and nervous, with a high color coming into her face; "I think Mrs. Breen forgot to say." Miss Breen had a thin, high-shouldered figure without much promise of development, black or dark eyes, thick and very black hair arranged in a profuse bang down to her ears and eyebrows and a "Psyche knot" at the back; and she wore a brown dress with a very large bustle and a waist with postilion-tails; and a remarkable little sailor hat with a straw crown and brim of brown leather set on top of her bangs and "Psyche" — all of which was

quite in the taste of the day for young ladies of her age. In spite of this fact, which should have given her a more assured bearing, Miss Breen was shy and awkward, and, as the lawyer's shrewd eyes easily perceived, most wretchedly ashamed of her companion; it made him want to laugh, yet a not wholly cynical sympathy mingled with and qualified his amusement, his impatience; the girl was so young.

"It's Mrs. Harry Breen's little girl — you remember Martha, I know," said Mrs. Tump, confidently. Lewis did indeed remember that lady perfectly, hoped she was well, and asked civilly after the other members of the family. Miss Breen's grandfather was dead — he died last year, she told him gravely.

"And there was an old lady — your cousin, or was she your aunt? — a very handsome old lady — Mrs. Danenhower, I think the name was — is she living still?"

"You mean Mrs. Von Donhoff — yes, she's living — she's in Havana now," said the girl. A peculiar stiffening change became apparent in Mrs. William's good-natured face; she bridled.

"Aunt Helen is —" she began.

"We don't want to keep you, Mr. Lewis — you must be busy," the girl broke in ruthlessly. She gently impelled the fat lady towards the interior of the room. "So glad to have met you — good day!" she said, bestowing on him a highly conventional nod and smile; she seemed to have received some queer reinforcement of self-possession, and spoke with a kind of authentic ease. Lewis walked off grinning a little to himself; the last he heard from Mrs. Tump she was explaining with her usual thoroughness to somebody that she had seen the auction sign and " — just thought I'd run in and bid on the ice-chest if it hadn't been sold yet. You know you can pick up things awfully cheap at second-hand sales sometimes. Why, Nellie Price got a diamond

sunburst pin once for *seven dollars*! She took it right away to an expert, and he said to her: 'Miss Price, you've got a pin there that's worth a hundred-and-fifty if it's worth a *cent*!' Just think! For *seven dollars* —!"

If Mr. Lewis had lingered a minute, or cast another glance behind him, he might have observed that the above remarks were addressed to a blond, youthful-faced gentleman hanging on the outskirts of the crowd, who had been occupying his leisure while waiting for Doctor Vardaman's pictures to be put up for sale, in a furtive scrutiny of Mrs. William Breen and, in particular, of Mrs. William Breen's guest; and upon whom the spindleshanked Teentsie presently threw herself with shrieks of joy. This was Mr. Jack Dodsley, in fact; he uncovered his head, flushing and smiling when the lady discovered him, and cast one or two embarrassed looks at the niece which Mrs. Breen finally noticed. "There, I forgot you'd never met Lets! Lets, it's Jack — you know, where we boarded for a while — with his grandmother, I mean. What are *you* doing here, anyhow, Jack?"

"Is it Mr. Dodsley?" said the young lady, looking at him frankly with her black eyes; "I'm Miss Breen," she explained again, not at all shyly this time; and the young fellow laughed nervously, and grew redder, and kept his eyes on her in his eager fashion, even while he listened to Mrs. Breen's talk.

"Why, *I'm* buying pictures," he said with humorous importance; and then afraid of misleading them, began quickly to explain: "oh, not for myself, you know. For Mr. Lewis and another gentleman, the head of our office. He's gone to Europe. Just look here —" he took out the telegram once more, and read it to them, interpreting the B-I-O-B phrase not without pride. "He spends a lot of money on pictures, and — and statuary, and — well, Persian rugs, you know, and

things like that. He's just as much of a collector as Doctor Vardaman was, I guess. Why, he paid seventeen hundred dollars duty here a month or so ago on some things he got from Italy — that wasn't the cost of the things themselves — it was seventeen hundred just to get 'em through the customs!"

"Oh, my!" said Mrs. Breen, profoundly moved. Miss Breen looked interested, but was silent.

"I've seen his rooms — they're beautiful," added young Dodsley, with enthusiasm; "they kind of look like the rooms you see on the stage, or in pictures, you know. Hey? Why, no, Mrs. Breen, they haven't got around to any of the common things yet. I don't know whether there was any — any kitchen-stuff."

"Well, if that isn't just like a man's housekeeping!" Mrs. Tump exclaimed in disdain; "pictures and books and not a dish pan in the place, I suppose! Come on, Lets, I don't believe there's any use in waiting round."

"Oh, don't go yet!" the young man pleaded with singular fervor; "he's just starting on the pictures now. Do wait and help me. I want to be sure and get the right ones, you know." He looked at the girl appealingly.

"I think that must be the one you're to bid so high on, now," said the latter, obligingly hanging back. "Wait and see it, Aunt Hattie." And, indeed, two of the auctioneer's satellites were at the instant hoisting into view a big dull old gilt frame with a big dull canvas in the midst of it, at sight of which there was some movement and talk among the company.

"This painting, ladies and gentlemen, was considered by Doctor Vardaman, I am told, as one of the best, if not *the* best, in his — er — his gallery," the auctioneer proclaimed, consulting a note just forwarded to him from Messrs. Levi & Bernstein's stronghold in the rear; "the doctor came across it in some — some comparatively obscure collection in one of our Eastern cities,

and at once purchased it. He called it — er —” he frowned over the memorandum, holding it to the light — “he called it ‘The Lady with the Symb — The Lady with the Sampler.’ A very descriptive title, as you observe the subject is a seated figure of a lady with some embroidery-work on a frame — the lady in a very pleasing fancy-dress. This picture, ladies and gentlemen, has been estimated to be at least a century old. The signature ‘E. B.’ was believed by Doctor Vardaman to be that of Elihu Booth, a pupil at one time of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Now, then, what am I offered — somebody start the bidding, please —”

“I never cared for that picture — the woman has such a queer face. And the complexion of all these old oil portraits I’ve ever seen is always just the color of very pale apple-jelly — greeny-pink,” whispered a lady on one of the farther seats to her neighbor.

“Well, it’s a good deal discolored, being so awfully old, I suppose,” said the other. “But the dress and the hair are perfectly lovely, Sue. I wish they’d bring in that style again — long-pointed waists with a square low-neck, and a black velvet ribbon around your throat, and your hair done up high. It would be becoming to everybody. I believe that’s what the doctor liked about it.”

“No, he didn’t. He was crazy over the expression — he used to say she had a real ‘Mona Lisa’ smile. And he liked those black eyes being so oval and long sideways, you know, with those long, slim, black eyebrows over them.”

“Well, do *you* like that ‘Gioconda’ picture? I never could see anything in it — and the costume’s hideous. If I had the choice, I’d take this one. Who’s bidding? Ninety-five dollars! Don’t you suppose that’s ridiculously cheap?”

“I’m the boy to buy pictures!” said young Dodsley, elatedly to his two ladies; “guess I’ll go in the business!”

"Don't you believe he'll get a new frame for it? This one's awfully old and dirty — and what do you suppose he wanted of that picture, anyhow? She's as ugly as a mud-fence," commented Mrs. Breen, frankly. She and her niece took their leave shortly afterwards, not waiting to witness the fate of the Bartolozzis. And on the way home the older lady descanted with a good deal of enthusiasm on the virtues of Jack Dodsley — what a nice fellow he was — so steady — so bright — so sweet to his grandmother! "I asked him to call, and I know he will, Lets. I do so want you to know some nice fellows."

The other listened with a great appearance of cordiality; although she was privately of opinion that a young man whose people kept a boarding-house was not exactly on a level with Miss Letitia Parrish Breen.

CHAPTER II

THE novelist — who knows everything — knows that Letty Breen's life was sufficiently prosaic during her term at school ; and so why trouble the readers of this story — which is a true story, as true a story as ever I told in my life, ladies and gentlemen ! — with its slow details ? Nobody wants to hear about how a young woman, were she ten times a heroine, got through her schooling. In after years, Letty herself could not remember much about it ; it seemed a colorless episode, even in her not too high-colored career.

Letty did well enough in class ; she made a quick, tractable, and very industrious pupil, thereby insuring a certain amount of popularity with her teachers — whether with her fellow-students or not, it would be hard to find out. From the first she was never entirely at home with them ; always she was conscious of a kind of detachment ; she never had a close friend, nor was carried away by those pretty, fond attacks of worship, common to young girls, for some other girl superior by good looks or talents. Letty knew scarcely anything about the normal youngster's home life or work or play ; she could not speak their shibboleth. The poor child's queer little brain was crammed full of archaic notions about personal reserve and personal dignity, about honor and courtesy, about birth and descent, which, however true and worthy they were in the abstract, became, as concretely exhibited by Letty, absurd and pathetic and eminently impractical. In the course of time she outgrew some of them a little ; and, possessing some sense of humor and a certain humanity

and liberality of disposition, she never offended her comrades, and, after the first, ceased to seem funny to them. She was not pretty enough or clever enough to get herself envied; in fact, she passed through her school years without attracting any notice from anybody, and with a record slightly above the average for achievement and good behavior.

Her absence from home gave old Mr. Breen another correspondent whom that active writer of letters welcomed almost with enthusiasm; Edward's circle had narrowed of recent years. He used to write his granddaughter at great length in a style of artificial simplicity which he thought suitable for young ladies; the old gentleman spent an incredible time and labor over these literary exercises; he had nothing to say, but he said it like Addison! Letty's mother wrote briefly and sensibly, as would have been expected of her. The girl went home only for the long summer vacations, to save the expense of travel; at other times she would be quite alone among the big, bare class rooms and dormitories, with the nuns chanting their office in the chapel below. She rather liked this quiet and relaxation of discipline, and consciously, at least, was neither homesick nor lonesome. Besides, she knew enough, by this time, of the family finances and about her Uncle Sylvanus's bequest to herself to understand the need for the utmost economy and management, and was by nature both too reasonable and too obedient to rebel. It was perhaps characteristic of old Edward and of the whole tribe of Breens that no one suggested the young woman should fit herself for teaching or some other way of making a living, since her worldly prospects were of the scantiest; but no one did, and Letty's own visions of the future, like those of most young girls, presented only a dim medley of elaborate toilettes, impossible heroes, and romantic-comedy scenes.

When she was about fifteen or sixteen, at a distressingly

gawky, shapeless, and flat-waisted age, she was invited to visit at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Breen. This good-natured lady, once having made the acquaintance of her husband's family, would not suffer it to lapse, although Heaven knows she received little enough encouragement. She wrote old Edward long, profuse letters wherein she retailed endless anecdotes about her children, her servants, her friends — none of whom he knew, and all of whom he thought beneath his notice! She sent him photographs of herself with successive babies; and on all the anniversaries weird little gifts — red flannel pen-wipers with woolly chickens in the middle of them — flowered china candlesticks — packets of chocolate cigars tied with pink ribbon — “From Bubba to dear G'an'pa — To G'an'pa with Tee's love and a Merry Christmas!” She proposed to go and spend the summer with him, so that the children would know their grandfather, and was only headed off with the greatest difficulty by terrific representations of the unsanitary conditions at Muskingum Street. Then she beleaguered him with entreaties to come and visit them — to live with them; he could have the front room — she knew he wouldn't mind having Tee's little crib put in one corner of it, whenever they had extra company! “Good Gad, the woman's *impossible!*” old Breen would groan to himself, with a wry laugh even in the midst of his impatience and contempt. It was something to his credit that in spite of what seemed to him an utterly addle-pated persistency, lack of tact, lack of breeding, lack of common sense, he kept his temper and always answered her with civility and a certain kindness. “The poor creature means well — she means well,” he would observe humanely. Sometimes, it is true, he felt himself obliged to employ a manner of some distance and formality, which should have appalled poor Mrs. William, but on the contrary filled her with delighted admiration and pride. She used to show the

letters to her intimates — “Isn’t he the most *elegant* — and at his age, too! You know the Breens are a perfectly splendid old family — I don’t know just how far back they go, but it’s behind the Revolution. I just wish you knew him, Angie; he’d love to talk to you. Your being related to somebody that came over in the *Mayflower* would interest him so. I declare I believe I’ll write to him about you. I always write him a nice, long, chatty letter, and tell him *everything*. He’s not like most old people—he’s awfully well preserved.”

Miss Letty Breen, with her lanky, high-shouldered figure, her schoolgirl braids, her unmanageable hands and feet and elbows, her entire ignorance of the world, should have been the last person to assume the critic, one would have thought. But she was perfectly well aware of her grandfather’s attitude, and can hardly be blamed for copying it; she went to make her visit with the sense of conferring a favor, and was painstakingly polite, considerate, and agreeable, as she had been drilled to be, during the three or four weeks of her stay. Before the end, she found, not without surprise, that she had gotten to be fond of this plebeian household. She liked the children; she liked her uncle, although he scarcely ever opened his mouth at home and bestowed on her a very vague, if kindly, attention, bolting his breakfast and reading the paper simultaneously of a morning, and rushing off to business, coming home wearily in the evening to bolt another meal and go to bed. Letty even liked the impossible Mrs. Tump, notwithstanding the amusement and annoyance and the disproportionate shame which the latter’s many “impossibilities” caused her. Everything was as different as it could well be from Muskingum Street. The William Breens lived in one of a half-circle of eight small brick houses, called “Pelham Crescent”; every parlor had a bay-window in front, every back yard a pump and a clothes-line. Within every one was to be found the

same golden-oak furniture, the same nickel-plated base-burners, the same kind of brass and wrought-iron fancy lamps, embroidered doilies, and passepartout frames. The residents hung out large cards bearing mystic inscriptions, "ICEMAN," or "EXPRESSMAN," when they wanted those functionaries to call; there was a neighborhood man-of-all-work who drank heavily, and might be seen sprawled out alongside the coal he should be shovelling, or the geraniums he should be weeding, any hour of the day; the eight houses liked to repeat stories about him to one another. Everybody knew everybody and was extraordinarily friendly, or else "not speaking"—"It's just like one big family," Mrs. William explained; "that's what I *love* about this neighborhood." She herself was forever "running in" to one or other of the houses for a chat, forever having vigorous, high-pitched disputes, or equally vigorous, high-pitched confidential talks with the plumber, the milkman, the grocer's boy, with anybody and everybody. She was the natural prey of all the front- and back-door pedlers that walked the streets, and the house was stocked with stove lids, picture-hooks, carpet tacks, what-not, all newly devised and indispensable, with face lotions and baking-powders, with encyclopedias, dictionaries, and books about the sexual relations acquired, for a dollar down and half a dollar a month thereafter. It was noisy and not too tidy; a constant procession of "girls" filed in and out, with occasional breaks when Mrs. Tump officiated in the kitchen herself; the children kept white mice in the cellar, when they were not keeping puppies, guinea-pigs, and rabbits, or raising mushrooms or developing photographs—also in the cellar; privacy was a thing unheard of and undesired; yet somehow it was a home. Nobody was comfortable, but everybody was happy.

If Letty, in spite of that small, private contempt she had learned or inherited for this kind of people and this

way of living, liked her kindly, helter-skelter set of relatives, they, on their part, took to her with a promptness and ardor which occasioned the girl some twinges of conscience. The older children hung around her and climbed over her; the baby cried to go to her. "Dear little Teentsy-weentsy, just see her stretch out her arms to you! Isn't that *too* sweet?" the mother would exclaim rapturously; "go ahead and take her, Lets, don't be afraid — you can hold her all right." Letty knew nothing about babies, and did not care especially for this one — in conscience, how could she be expected to? she thought with irritation. Nevertheless, she was obliging, and had a great notion of what was proper, conventional, and mannerly. She took the baby — and afterwards overheard, with a miserable feeling of humbug and imposture, the enthusiastic report of Mrs. Tump to the lady next door — "Lets is the *sweetest* girl, and just crazy about our baby! You ought to see her with Teents; you can hardly get her to give the child up!" Letty ended by liking the baby well enough, too; she was of a disposition to get along with anybody.

She made two or three successive visits to Pelham Crescent; they provided all the social experience she had up to her nineteenth year. Sometimes Mrs. William gave little parties; it was most convenient to do this after the base-burner had been taken down for the summer, as that made so much more room in the front hall, she used to say. There was always a great stir about clean curtains; a caterer brought in ice-cream and numbers of small round cakes of an extraordinary texture somewhere between flint and chewing-gum; tables were borrowed at various houses; the neighborhood came. They played progressive games whereof the scores were entered on pretty little cards with pink and blue ribbons and miniature pink and blue pencils. There were prizes of silver match-boxes for "gentlemen's high" and painted satin sachet bags for "ladies' high";

"gentleman's bottom-score" was presented with a pint bottle of tomato-sauce tied with ribbons around the neck — "So you'll learn to *ketch-up* — see?" Mrs. Tump would explain with delight. This joke was so good it lasted several seasons and went the round of all the "progressives" in the Crescent. On these occasions Letty's Uncle William took part, with a preternaturally wakeful air; Letty used to wonder if he or any of the men really enjoyed it. She could hardly have told whether she herself did or not; she had not much turn for games, took the business of playing very seriously, and was mortally afraid of offending her partner by some gross mistake. Otherwise, the girl was self-possessed enough, her conviction (which, however, she had too much caution, or too good a training, to betray) that she was superior to any one in the room supporting her.

Once or twice on those bird-of-passage flights from one end of the country to the other which he seemed to be in the habit of making, Mr. Thomas Breen stopped off to see his brother. He was as big, as heavily mustached and richly suited as ever; and so loud, jolly, and humorous he frightened Mrs. William, to whom these visits were a dire experience. The poor little lady shrank before his manner of some great, noisy, adventurous, and cold-hearted world outside her own; she trembled for the morals of her husband and her children. Her brother-in-law's clothes seemed to her to be lined with cigars and whiskey flasks, articles which she herself would not allow in the house; she had to sit by in uneasy and jealous silence while Thomas talked of matters and cut jokes which she could not understand, but which, alas! entertained and enlivened her William as she had never been able to do. Thomas beguiled William out o' nights and kept him out till three in the morning, when they both crept back, sniggering up the stairs in the dark with their boots off — horror! Letty, from the little third-story room she occupied, heard them,

and laughed companionably; she had no sympathy for her aunt, sitting up, forlorn and angry and foolish, on the landing below. The girl thought of poor Mrs. Tump with a feeling not far removed from the good-natured contempt of Thomas Breen, of old Edward himself. Her aunt had been kindness itself to her — but what of that? Youth is hard. For her part, Letty liked her Uncle Tom enthusiastically; he bought her a new hat, took her to the races, promised her a trip to Europe. His anecdotes, his fun, his fluent talk, did not frighten Letty; she found his society vastly more agreeable and satisfactory than that of Pelham Crescent with all its “progressives,” and saw him depart with real regret.

It was at this time that Letty's grandfather died. The old man — he must have been well past eighty — had not failed much during these final years; he was quite clear-headed to the last, and, contrary to all moral precedent, concluded his long, futile, worthless career by dying like a gentleman, courageously and tranquilly. It happened while Letty was at school. “. . . I think it best for you not to come home to the funeral,” her mother wrote in her firm and clear and curiously characteristic hand; “you had better finish the course, as we planned. The journey here and back would break up your school-year, besides costing more than we can afford. . . .” It is to be feared Letty was not overwhelmed with distress either at the news of the death or this decision; old Edward had not been a person to inspire much tenderness. Letty felt the loss a good deal more after she reached home that summer; she missed the old gentleman's white-haired and suavely imperious presence about the house; and even cried a little at sight of the mahogany desk with the books above and the mysterious let-down drawer in the middle which was so inextricably associated with him in all her memories. Otherwise the place was the same, with 'Liz-

beth Hurd in the kitchen, and Letty's mother running endless seams at her work-table. Letty was so used to it that she scarcely comprehended and then did not believe 'Lizbeth when the latter said in her usual gruff and abrupt fashion: "Yer maw ain't so well as she useter be, Letty. You'd ought —" 'Lizbeth paused and swallowed; words never came easily to her — "you'd ought to look out fer her," she finished, gazing out of the window, and wiping her fingers on her apron mechanically.

Letty, slightly disturbed, went in and examined her mother furtively. Mrs. Breen was, indeed, very thin, and drooped over her needle with a suggestion of frailty; but the girl could not remember her any other way. Her mother had never looked strong enough for the things she did; one might have supposed her a mechanism of steel economized to the last degree possible for strength and elasticity. In spite of the cares she had had, there was not a thread of gray in her straight, pale gold hair; her face was unlined and sometimes singularly youthful, for in the constant fatigue of her expression there was nothing physical; you would have said her soul was tired. Letty, noting no changes, decided that this was all one of 'Lizbeth's notions — she always was a cranky old thing, the girl thought. "If she *hadn't* been so cranky, she never in the wide world would have stayed here!" added Letty to herself, with a touch of humor.

"Mother," she said that evening, "I want you to tell me something. Who —?" she stopped short, dismayed at a sudden pallor, terror, and appeal visible without warning in the older woman's face. Letty, not being at all a student of such matters, misread the look; she thought her mother was in pain. "Wh-what is it?" she stammered, frightened; "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Breen, almost instantly return-

ing to her pose of resolute calm. "You spoke so abruptly you startled me — you made me jump, that's all. Did I look odd? What is it you want to know, Letty?"

"Who pays 'Lizbeth, and what are we living on?" said the girl, coloring hotly and guiltily; accustomed as she was to the polite reserves and evasions of old Edward Breen's household, she uttered this straightforward question with unimaginable difficulty. But her mother appeared, if anything, pleased rather than shocked at so much plainness of speech; she got up and brought an account-book, and they went over it together, Mrs. Breen talking and explaining almost with eagerness. The book had careful rulings in red ink, and figures set down in neat columns; the items, both debit and credit, were of a smallness to wring the heart, but neither of the two women knew that. It was very nearly the first subject in which they had ever felt an equal and common interest, and at the moment they were nearer together than at any time before in their lives.

When her grandfather died, Letty discovered, he had left nothing but a fine capital of debts, which his creditors had so little prospect of collecting — indeed, some of these transactions were so old as to be outlawed and forgotten — that none of them, fortunately, pressed the matters; and Mrs. Breen, for her part, had found out that what had been supporting them was a very small monthly contribution from honest William Breen, whose own means, as Letty knew, were narrow enough, combined with irregular donations from Thomas, and another set sum given by — of all people in the world! — Mr. D. W. Gates. "You remember him, don't you?" Mrs. Breen asked.

"Yes, I remember him — I hated him so," said the girl, resentfully, yet with a half laugh; "he made fun of me, and I simply hated him. What's he mixing into our affairs for, anyhow?" she demanded severely;

she had no thought of gratitude. "He's no relation to us. He'd be glad enough to be related to the Breens, I expect."

"He is connected, in a way; but I don't know that that has ever done him much good," said her mother, dryly. "He began giving the money three years ago after your Aunt Charlotte died. He wrote a very kind letter offering it, and — and your grandfather took it. I believe that your grandfather thought that some of Mr. Gates's own fortune had come indirectly from the Breens, through Bishop Breen's wife — your Aunt Charlotte, you know. He thought that was one of the reasons Mr. Gates wanted to — to give him this; and so he thought himself justified in taking it."

Letty sat silent; she was receiving for the first time in her life some real illumination on her grandfather's character, and her pride was stung to the quick. The glory and the tragedy of nineteen is its inability to make allowances.

"I think Grandpa didn't need to take that money," she said at last in a choked voice; "it was Mr. Gates's own money, no difference who it came from. Even if he felt as if he ought to give it, Grandpa didn't need to take it. We haven't any claim on Mr. Gates. It's — it's shameful!"

Her mother looked at the heated young face with an odd mixture of pride, pity, satire. "You will get over thinking that way," she said; "it made things easier for your grandfather, and he was an old man, remember."

"Well, *we're* not beholden to him, anyhow," said Letty, loftily; "I've just had what Uncle Sylvanus left me, and you never took anything from Mr. Gates."

"I'm not taking anything now, at any rate," Mrs. Breen said in her emotionless way; "after your grandfather's death I told Mr. Gates I could manage without. I make a little sewing, and that will do us. Before that, of course, Mr. Gates's money helped me as well as every-

body else in the house; it paid 'Lizbeth's wages, for one thing. So I benefited by it, too, Letty."

"You couldn't help yourself," said Letty, defensively. Her mother shrugged; the gesture was unusual with her, and caught Letty's attention, reminding her of Mrs. Von Donhoff, of whom she had not thought for years. "Where's Aunt Helen now?" she asked.

Mrs. Breen was not quite certain; the old lady moved about a good deal. She had not come to her brother Edward's funeral, although she had written a letter full of noble and touching sentiment, and of a highly Christian resignation, Mrs. Breen recalled with a shadowy smile.

"Has *she* got anything to live on?" Letty inquired.

"I believe Mr. Gates gives her something, too," said Mrs. Breen, with reluctance.

"He must think we're a nice set of paupers," said the girl, bitterly; tears of mortification came into her eyes.

"How did Grandpa ever get along without him? Who used to pay 'Lizbeth?"

"She wasn't always paid," said her mother. She put aside the account-book, and took up her sewing.

"Then what did she stay for?" Letty said, puzzled, and not without a kind of vague fear of further revelations; "we don't live like anybody else, and it can't be a very good place. What made 'Lizbeth stay, if she didn't get paid?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Breen; and in the tone of one weary with wondering about it, she added more to herself than to her daughter; "some people don't really seem to care about money!"

CHAPTER III

ABOUT the time Letty Breen was born, forty-odd years ago, and twenty years before Mr. and Mrs. Will Breen moved to the state capital to live and invited her there to visit them, the firm of David Dodsley & Company, Stationers & Printers, 64 South High Street, in that city, failed. Hard times, too much confidence, mismanagement, domestic extravagance — for any or all of these causes which people recited to one another with sad or disapproving looks, David Dodsley & Company went to the wall. David was an elderly man then, — he had been in business twenty-eight years, — and he walked home with a shuffling step and bowed head, looking already a great deal older, the day the news was posted. He walked home to the fine, big house he had built on Long Street, with the green lawn at the side, and the old-fashioned flowers blooming in stone urns on either hand as you entered; and when little Jack Dodsley, who was then six or seven, playing with his velocipede up and down the walk, saw his grandfather coming and dropped the toy and came running with a shout, the old man picked him up and hugged him so tight the child did not know what to make of it and squirmed to get away. David set him down with a sigh, for once not heeding the little fellow's prattle; how much he had planned to do for that boy with his money — how much! Little Jack was conscious of something foreign in the atmosphere; afterwards he always remembered how his grandfather, sitting at the head of the handsome supper table, and letting dish after dish be carried off untouched, had said heavily,

"I — I think you'd better not take the new carriage out for your drive this evening, Maria — I think maybe you'd better not go out," and how the lady looked at him in surprise. She knew nothing about the failure, having always been kept in a happy ignorance of her husband's affairs and worries.

This scene was, in fact, the most enduring recollection Master Jack retained of the only period of prosperity and ease he had ever known in his life. Being, as is natural to small boys, quite indifferent to his surroundings, whether luxurious or the reverse, and being, besides, of a very simple, straightforward, and unimaginative temperament, he did not notice at the time, and was unable to picture to himself in later years, the sudden change in their manner of living, the gradual decline of the establishment, the waning of his grandfather's health, the cares and distresses of shabby gentility. By the time Jack was fourteen years old, and going to his first job in the City Engineer's office up at the Waterworks, he was as used to the poor man's and the worker's view of life as if he had been born in a tenement; according to fixed precedent there is millionaire-ship and a seat in the Cabinet, if not higher, in prospect, for every American boy who begins his career with empty pockets and hard labor, so young Dodsley had no idea of being sorry for himself. If the widow, his grandmother, cherished some bitter regrets, she still, like a sensible and unselfish woman, kept them private and did her part bravely as best she knew.

Unfortunately, that was not very well; Mrs. Dodsley — she was one of the Duncan family, a good old name in the state and city, honorably and in some instances wealthily connected — had not been brought up in a practical fashion. All her fifty-odd years of life she had been shielded, petted, and cared for; she was not hard enough for the hard conditions now confronting her. How could she beat and bully and push her way

through the world? The modern woman of business would have seemed to her and her generation a frightful, forward, strong-minded creature, for whom *unladylike* was entirely too mild a word. Mrs. Dodsley resorted to the time-worn expedients of her class; she took boarders in her big house which she attempted to manage alternately with too many servants and with too few servants; she tried to embroider, tried to sell preserves, tried to paint china, tried five hundred things without succeeding at any one thing, failing and beginning anew with an unparalleled resolution, cheerfulness, and perseverance. In spite of all her efforts, she never got both ends to meet; she used to run behind at the grocer's, and lie awake all night long meditating reforms and retrenchments and desperate economies which the first complaint from one of her boarders would put to confusion. In her moments of discouragement she would think of what she now considered the criminal follies and extravagances of her married life with a kind of vindictiveness. "If David had only *told* me — if I'd only *known* I ought to have been helping him save money instead of spending every cent, none of this might have happened," the poor thing would say to herself with tears. Once in a while various Duncans among her nearer relatives would get together and in solemn conclave decide to lift Maria's bills, or to give Maria the money to have her teeth fixed. The widow never asked these favors; her notions of integrity and proper pride forbade any such appeals. It was a hard business for her to support the position of poor relation, and to take money hampered with stipulations about its use with anything like dignity and graciousness, yet she contrived to do it. "It isn't as if I wasn't *trying* — trying my best to do something for myself," she would reflect; "and they're all just as kind as they can be about it, even if they *do* hurt one's feelings sometimes — and I'm doing it for Jack's sake, anyhow."

Jack turned out a steady boy. He got thirty dollars a month at the Waterworks, all of which he gave unquestioningly to his grandmother; and likewise took unquestioningly the limited pocket-money she allotted him out of his own earnings. He had a willing and gentle disposition, never seeming to be beset by the wild temptations of most young men. Maria Dodsley used to thank God on her knees every night when she went to her bed, and saw the boy's light over the transom of his little hall room, and knew that he too was tranquilly getting ready for sleep within that door. They were great companions; he went over her accounts with her, or read novels aloud — innocuous novels composed by the giants of those days, Mr. E. P. Roe, Mrs. Alexander, Mrs. Oliphant, and others — Sunday afternoons, or sitting by her lamp in the winter evenings. Christmas week they venturesomely bought general-admission tickets to the "Messiah" and gave themselves a holiday, listening to the great music from the back row of seats in the second gallery at the "Grand." Once Jack saved the money from his allowance to buy his grandmother a near-seal muff; the widow cried over it privately in her room — they were tears of sheer joy and thankfulness. He went to church with her Sunday mornings, as attentive to the little withered lady in her ancient black silk and her crape veil of widowhood which she had never taken off, with her worn prayer-book in her shabbily gloved hands that trembled a little nowadays — as attentive to her as if she had been one of these pretty, flyaway young girls with their bangs and their bustles, the grandmother thought fondly. Plenty of them would be making eyes at him presently, she said to herself, half in pride, half in jealous anxiety, Jack was so good-looking, he had such beautiful manners, such a strong, fine character — although it was little enough girls cared about *that!* She was not at all mercenary, but she had dreams wherein she saw Jack being married

to any one of half a dozen heiresses with much pomp and circumstance — a church full of flowers, white illusion, satin trains, Mendelssohn, iced champagne, rice and old shoes, Mr. and Mrs. John Fremont Dodsley driving off to the railroad station to live happily ever after on nobody knows how many thousand a year. Throughout all her struggles the widow clung to her social position; boarding-house and all, Mrs. Maria Dodsley never ceased to be a lady of one of our best families; and when Jack grew up, she lamented more than all her real troubles and privations the fact that their wretched lack of means kept the young fellow from what she called "taking his proper station in the world."

Indeed, as genuinely kindly and well-bred as she was, Mrs. Dodsley always felt a certain superiority to her boarders; perhaps not the least of her private and particular crosses was the consciousness that she must work early and late and wear herself to the bone for a set of people whom, with rare exceptions, she considered immutably "common." She must send them bills, take their money, listen to their fault-finding; in twenty years of swallowing it, she never got over the bitterness of the pill. Out of all the crew of young married couples, state legislators and their families, bachelor clerks, commercial travellers, and what-not who abode some while in the Long Street house and went their way, almost the only one whom their landlady felt was fit to meet her on an equal ground was Mr. D. W. Gates, whose father and mother she had known in the old days and whose aunt, the bishopess, had been an intimate friend as far back as when the Right Reverend Sylvanus used to preach in old Trinity. The young man came and boarded with her for a few months one winter when the suite of apartments in the handsome new flat-building then in erection into which he proposed to move were not yet finished, and while he was having them decorated and put in order. Quite unconsciously, for he was any-

thing but pompous or fond of display, this gentleman, who had been used to money all his life, who, in the familiar phrase, knew everybody, went everywhere, and had seen everything, brought into the boarding-house, as it were, some whiff from the air of that great, easy, good-looking, well-dressed, well-educated, well-mannered world to which he belonged ; his landlady basked in it. She liked to see him come down in full dress of an evening and go off to Mrs. Somebody's dinner, or Miss So-and-so's german ; she liked to pile the cards and notes and monogrammed envelopes by the side of his plate at breakfast, while the other boarders eyed them, from behind their own plebeian correspondence, covertly with awe or envy ; she looked with a maternal interest at his clothes with the names of London and New York tailors emblazoned within, at his canes and meerschauts, and the beautiful and luxurious trifles with which he stocked his room. That was the way Jack would have been living this minute, if it hadn't been for her foolishness and poor David's bad luck, the widow sighed inwardly. She chatted confidentially with him about old times and people ; and finding that Mr. Gates, although a man of fashion, was somebody to be reckoned with in the business world, where he had on occasions showed himself capable of hard and well-executed work, she by and by imparted to him with a great deal of simplicity many of her worries and difficulties, and in particular her hopes for Jack.

Gates, for his part, was very amiable and sympathetic ; if Mrs. Dodsley amused him a little, she touched him much more. He thought it a sad thing to see a gentlewoman fallen on evil days in her old age ; and listened with respect and interest to her talk of a by-gone generation. "She's a kind of a curio," he told his friends privately ; "something unique in the way of landladies. A fine lady of the old school keeping boarders ! It's a shame ; you can't help but feel that

it's not right, that you ought to do something about it. The trouble is, you can't really do anything for people in your own class — there isn't any tactful or delicate way of helping them."

Nevertheless, in the kindness of his heart he did devise a way to help Mrs. Dodsley, than which nothing could have gratified her more. For, finding out, upon a few judicious questions, that young Jack Dodsley was still in the Waterworks at the age of twenty-three, getting fifty dollars a month now after ten years and apparently not likely ever to get any more, Mr. Gates suggested a clerkship in his own office — or rather the office of the "RIGGINS ESTATE," as appeared lettered in gold on a ground-glass back on all the doors on the ninth floor of the "RIGGINS BUILDING" — where the young fellow presently removed to a desk at double his former salary. Jack, honest lad, took this change as a windfall of good luck, a gift from the gods, went at his new duties with unimaginable delighted zeal, and thanked his patron so fervently as to reduce that gentleman to wordless and annoyed embarrassment. But let nobody suppose that Mrs. Dodsley overwhelmed either Webster Gates or the Almighty with expressions of gratitude; she was polite, but not enthusiastic. *She* knew that her boy was merely getting something like his due at last; Mr. Gates might think himself fortunate to obtain the services of such a young man, and had only been ordinarily astute and appreciative. Gates was at least astute and appreciative enough to be again both touched and amused by the widow's attitude; he really had no great opinion of Jack's abilities. "It's an honest, industrious boy," he thought; "and he'll never get anywhere, unless somebody picks him up and puts him there! Well, there're a good many of 'em like that — and not always honest or industrious, either, by George!"

Perhaps young Dodsley's performance in the office

bore out this judgment ; he'd never set the river on fire, some of the older men remarked to one another with dry grins. Everybody liked the boy, he was so frank, earnest and eager, so ready to accept any one's correction and to listen to any one's advice, so pleased with his position, and devoted to his employer. He thought Mr. Gates the finest gentleman, the most brilliant and accomplished man of the world that ever existed, quoted him on all occasions, and timidly copied or tried to copy his dress and manner. He came home to his grandmother with long, delightful tales of the high and mighty people who frequented the office, of Mr. Gates's affairs both business and pleasure, of his friends male and female — "I hope they're all nice people, — the right sort of people, Jack?" Mrs. Dodsley asked a little nervously. She had already inquired minutely into the moral and social standing of Jack's fellow-clerks.

"Oh my, yes — deadly swell, the whole lot of them. Why, *you* know who So-and-so is —" he named them, with an ingenuous pride ; "Mr. Archer Lewis —"

"Yes. He's a son of Judge Lewis — of course *he's* nice. The Lewises are all nice people ; his mother was Jennie Lattimer. There were two of those Lattimer girls, and I remember Josie married Doctor Brazee, one of those Lancaster Brazees — very nice people."

"And Mr. Johns — Mr. Theodore Johns, but they all call him Teddy, you know —"

"Johns?" said the lady, in a cold voice ; "*Johns?* He must be some relation to old Michael Johns that used to keep the livery-stable — I never heard of any other Johns here. Well, well, all sorts of people get into society nowadays — anybody that has money. It wasn't so in my time. Mr. Gates's father was a lawyer — a very fine man. They used to say he dissipated, but I never noticed anything of the kind — nor about this Mr. Gates, either, though he has so much money it wouldn't be surprising —" she looked at the young man ques-

tioningly ; and Jack's face was so perfect a blank that the grandmother immediately felt sure he knew more than he would tell her. "There isn't any use asking," she thought ; "men won't tell on each other ever, even when it's their duty to warn people — they're so funny, they think it's not honorable !" Perhaps in making this admission, she realized for the first time that her grandson had grown up.

In fact, the young man spent his own money now, kept pipes in his room like Mr. Gates, went to the ball game sometimes, made various additions to his wardrobe with the utmost innocent relish, and treated his grandmother to a good seat at the play, and ice-cream or broiled oysters afterwards when New Year's Day came around and everybody in the office got the annual holiday tip. As soon as he was making a little more, he assured her, the boarders would have to go. They would sell the old house and get a nice little one somewhere, or a flat that wouldn't be so much trouble for her to take care of — he was full of happy plans. None of them looked towards marriage and a home of his own, Mrs. Dodsley noted with a strange mixture of wonder, relief, and regret, though he was twenty-seven years old, and most young men — But Jack was not like most young men — he was infinitely superior. And he had a very refined and exacting taste in girls as in everything else. See how necessary he had become to Mr. Gates, if for only that one quality. She doubted if there was another person on earth to whom the head of the "RIGGINS ESTATE" would have intrusted the buying of that picture the other day ; that was really a pretty heavy responsibility, the grandmother thought with a kind of prideful concern. Jack had come home quite silent and absent-minded, answering her in monosyllables and smoking those health-menacing pipes one after another in an alarming absorption, and had slept restlessly that night ; she heard him moving about his room.

CHAPTER IV

THE truth is, Mr. Jack Dodsley, having fulfilled his commissions, and given orders for the disposition of the pictures, went back to his desk, and got through his work somehow, and returned to his home, and smoked all those deleterious pipes, and went to his uneasy bed, all in a species of daze or dream, illuminated, so to speak, by the flashing lustre of two large black eyes. He had been in Miss Breen's company ten minutes, during which the young lady had scarcely uttered as many words ; but Jack thought of her as a man might who had never seen a woman before in his life. What girl whom he had ever beheld possessed such a pair of black eyes, and slender, level black brows, such a complexion, such an odd, alluring, faintly quizzical smile ? — thus he reflected. She had looked straight at him frank as a boy, and spoken without embarrassment or sly consciousness, although she must have known he had been staring at her ever since she entered the room. Yes, *staring* — he couldn't help it. What if she thought him ungentlemanly ? But it was far more likely that she was so used to being stared at, such a girl as she was, that she hadn't thought anything of it at all ; he hoped so devoutly. And after they met, what kind of an impression had he made on her, he wondered, coloring foolishly as he looked at himself in the glass. He wished he had been doing something a little more elevated than bidding on pictures at an auction — and for another man, at that. Mrs. Breen had asked him to call ; he remembered it with a burst of gratitude that would have astounded the lady herself. Would he call — *would* he ! The young fellow

was tremulously, delightedly aware of what had befallen him; so well aware that, although at some of the images that went racing through his mind hot shame suffused him, he still did not forbid them. Why shouldn't he be in love, he said to himself defensively; it was all *right*; he would cut off his hand rather than touch her unless she — he stopped short, ashamed again.

And so on and so on, round and round in a circle *da capo*. Never having been in love before, and the malady having come on with the notorious violence of "first sight," it went hard with Mr. Dodsley, as most juvenile diseases are said to be more than commonly virulent when they attack the adult. He spent his odd moments at the office next day figuring out on scraps of paper and the backs of envelopes the possibilities of a salary of thirteen hundred a year divided between two people. It had never seemed quite enough for his grandmother and himself, without being supplemented by the boarders — but this was *different*, he assured himself. He knew men who had married and gone to housekeeping on less, and they all seemed to get along; you were pretty sure to get a raise when you married, anyhow, a married man being universally considered by employers much more likely to be steady and to have a better idea of his responsibilities than a bachelor. Mr. Gates might boost him to fifteen hundred — it could hardly be less than that, and fifteen hundred would make it plain sailing for them. Say twenty-five a month for the house — he had seen plenty of nice little houses that could be rented for that, with nice plumbing and everything; then there would be three dollars a week for the hired girl; and Letty — his hand trembled as he scrawled the name with a ridiculous thrill, — Letty must have something to dress on; and oh, yes, of course there was the marketing, they had to *live*, the idea of his forgetting *that*! He broke out laughing — a laugh

which he confusedly tried to turn into a cough at sight of the astonished and inquiring face of the man at the opposite desk. "What's the joke, Dod?" asked the other, with curiosity. "Oh, nothing — I — I was just thinking of something that happened at the sale yesterday," Jack said lamely, conscious all at once of the moonshine quality of these speculations. Nevertheless, he went home still revolving them, Alnaschar-wise; and aroused Mrs. Dodsley's fears for his health by the indifference of his appetite at the evening table. She herself might have gone without a bite for days, and Jack, in his present state of mind, would never have noticed it. Alas for poor old Maria Dodsley! If she entered into her grandson's calculations at all, it was only to be dismissed with the vague conclusion that of course he would fix it all for her, somehow; she might keep on taking boarders, for that matter.

The old lady had lately experienced something of a shock and a severe disappointment, upon receiving into her house the William Breen family, that being a name which she associated from old times with a much loftier style of personage than Mrs. Tump and her brood. She had expected Bishop Breen's own nephew to be another edition of — let us say — Mr. D. W. Gates, with a wife and children to match; instead, he turned out a plain man in spectacles — "And all the old set of Breens were so good-looking!" said Mrs. Dodsley, in pained surprise — very quiet and hard-working, with a lot of ordinary children, and a wife more *ordinary* still; and it is amazing how much contumely may be expressed by that harmless-looking adjective. She heard Jack announce his intention of visiting them — which the young fellow did with an unnecessary swagger to conceal his real trepidation — with some surprise, but a ready understanding; it was a kind act and just like Jack, she thought; the children were very fond of him (what more natural?), and she herself had promised to

go and see Mrs. Breen — with a mental reservation that she would only do it once. "She's really *too* ordinary — a nice, good woman, but very ordinary, you know that, Jack," she said, sitting on the bed in the young man's room, and watching him tie his cravat.

"Oh, well!" said Jack, tolerantly. His back was to his grandmother as he looked into the mirror, and he was glad that she could not see the red that mounted to his face as he added laboriously careless: "I couldn't get out of going there, anyway. She wants me to meet her niece again, you know."

"Her niece? What niece?" said Mrs. Dodsley, with an indescribable appearance of pricking up her ears. "You mean the one she was always talking about? I didn't know she was here. The one they call Letty, I mean?"

"I — I believe so — I *think* her name's Letty. It's a niece of *Mr.* Breen's, really, not Mrs. Breen's at all. She's a Miss Breen."

"Have you seen her? You didn't say so," said the grandmother.

"What, didn't I? I — I meant to, but it was only for a minute, you know," said Jack, burrowing into the wardrobe. "What makes her ask so many questions?" he thought nervously. "I — I just saw her for a second the other day at the sale," he went on aloud. "Don't know whether I'd know her again if I saw her!"

"Is she pretty?"

"Why, she's slim, and has beautiful black hair, a great deal of it, you know, and black eyes and eyebrows — I don't believe I ever saw anything quite like her eyes, they're — they're remarkable, you know. You don't often see *black* eyes; and then she has a very fair, clear complexion. I suppose that kind of shows up her eyes and hair more; I mean it's a regular blond complexion, as fair as if she had yellow hair. It's — it's very unusual — remarkable. And she looks right *at*

you, in an unusual sort of way — right *at* you, square in the eyes, and smiles in a way I don't think I ever saw before; it's not an ordinary *smile*, you know, it's really remarka —" Jack pulled up short, aghast at the volubility and warmth of his own speech; in a rage, he felt himself crimsoning to the very ears. "Yes — I — I suppose you'd call her pretty," he ended feebly, not daring to look at his grandmother.

"Yes, I suppose I would," said Mrs. Dodsley, in a controlled voice; she made no comment on the photographic accuracy of this portrait of a young woman whom Jack was not certain of knowing again should he meet her; and presently got up and went out of the room. Jack wondered if she suspected anything — that was a pretty bad break he made just now!

In the meanwhile, Miss Breen was not looking forward to this event with any sort of excitement. Even if Letty had not been cautious and reserved by nature, the lifelong drill of her home would have taught her to command her emotions; but, to tell the truth, Mr. Dodsley had aroused none in that cool young breast — none even remotely approaching his own, at any rate. Letty thought he was very nice — what she had seen of him; she had been much more interested by Mr. Lewis, by the other people in the salesroom among whom were well-dressed women and two or three girls and young men about her own age with a certain air of the world about them, laughing together in subdued voices — by the auctioneer and the wares themselves. Also she was unhappily conscious of her fat, warm, excited little aunt, who was not well dressed and had no air of the world whatever, charging about into corners, asking agonizingly absurd questions, dragging her little girl by the hand across ladies' laps and between men's knees, and calling out for "Lets" to follow her in a voice of disheartening volume and distinctness. It was

impossible to pretend not to belong to her ; and equally impossible for Letty, who had the trained humanity of good manners, to silence her. "She wouldn't know what to make of it if I asked her not to go screaming my name around that way in a public place. She'd just think I was cross!" thought Letty, in despair. She was thankful when this ordeal was over at last, and walked back home with her aunt, listening in disdainful silence to the latter's eager confidences about the Dodsleys, and the other acquaintances Mrs. Tump had made, the social plans she was revolving.

"I don't know very many people in the neighborhood yet, but they've been just lovely about letting me run in and use their telephones, and the lady next door was just *sweet* about putting a note in their milk crock the night before to tell the milkman to stop at our house — I'm sure we're going to like it. As soon as I get to know a few more, I'll give a progressive and ask everybody and kind of start things going, so you'll have a lovely time, Lets. I don't know if there're any young men in our Row or not. There's an awfully nice fellow we met when we were boarding, Mr. Bokus, George Bokus, but the children call him Bokey, you know he used to give them caramels — he travels for a candy house — I'll ask him, if he's home. And then Jack Dodsley, of course — he's lovely — such a perfect little gentleman. You know he belongs to a splendid old family, only they've lost all their money, and his grandmother has to take boarders, but she's a very refined lady — she always wears a little cap around the house, and looks so nice — and her hair in those cute little sausage-rolls on each side of her face, and a black dress, she's just *dear!*" Mrs. Tump wound up enthusiastically.

One of the depressing curiosities of human nature is that this sort of eulogy somehow invariably prejudices us against the person it was designed to benefit ! That was a wary sage who prayed to be delivered from

his friends. Letty was nowise moved from her contemptuous mood by these well-meant assurances; she thought of the candy salesman and the boarding-house with an impatient superiority, and came down when the bell rang that evening in a very cool and careless frame of mind. Yet Jack Dodsley *was* a gentleman; and when the young fellow got up to meet her, coming forward nervously happy with his eager eyes, his ready flush, his nice, pleasant manner, Letty found herself unexpectedly warming to him. She had on a clear blue muslin dress, a cheap, pretty thing her mother had made for her, with a collar Letty herself embroidered and a little string of coral beads and a blue sash — Jack thought she was the most beautiful and desirable creature in the world thus angelically attired; he marvelled afterwards that he had managed not to betray himself. As a matter of fact, he would not have had much chance, for this call was quite a family event; the children clustered at the door, peeping in, and were brusquely hustled off by their mother; Letty's uncle came in with a rather abstracted welcome — "Ah, Jack, how d'ye do? How's things at the office?" he said, sat for a few minutes, and wandered out, smothering a yawn. He could be heard tiptoeing up the stairs and tiptoeing about in the room overhead a moment later. The hired girl appeared, thunderously discharged a scuttleful of anthracite into the top of the hall stove, clanged its several doors and dampers with deafening emphasis, and at last departed, with the effect of leaving a great peace upon the universe. Jack said it was a little chilly for the season of the year.

"Did you get all the pictures?" Letty asked him.

"Yes, oh, yes. I wish you could have seen the funny old things Mr. Lewis wanted. I got 'em for twenty-five, the whole four of 'em. Now that big oil-painting, I could see why Mr. Gates was so set on having that — it was so pretty."

"Mr. Gates?" repeated Letty, interested.

"Yes, Mr. D. W. Gates — *you* know, don't you? There isn't but the one Gates here, and everybody knows who *he* is," said Jack, not without pride. "He's the head of our office — the Riggins Estate, that is; D. W.'s for Daniel Webster — he makes a good deal of fun of his name."

"Oh, yes, I know who you mean now," Letty said; and the expression of her face prompted Jack's memory, for he exclaimed in a sudden illumination: "*Why, of course!* You're related to him! At least your uncle is, so my grandmother said."

"Well — halfway related, yes," said the girl, with a reluctance she would have been at a loss to explain. "It's too distant to amount to anything. I wouldn't know him nor he me, if we were to meet. I don't call us related at all!" The assertion gave her a curious satisfaction. "I'm not going to go around claiming relationship with that wealthy, big man!" she told herself in savage pride; "he'll find there's one Breen, anyhow, that doesn't care a pin about him or his money!"

"Well, he's a nephew of an old Bishop Breen that used to be here, and my grandmother said your uncle was, too. I suppose you know all about it. Grandma knows about everybody and their fathers and mothers back to the year One," said the young man. "She'll have *you* all nailed down and labelled directly. I told her about you."

"About me? You couldn't have told her very much," said Letty, and smiled; and looked at him with her direct gaze, under which Jack colored again.

"Well, I — I spoke about meeting you," he said confusedly; but his honest blue eyes met hers. All at once, with a paralyzing stab of surprise, Letty understood! She went on talking with the same open face and look, the same little humorous smile.

Few women, even the most sophisticated veterans at the business, ever feel such an assurance of their own attractions, or get so used to devotion from the other sex as to perceive without wonder the fact that some man is in love with them. Miss Letty Breen, who had had scarcely any experience at all, not only wondered, but was inclined to doubt, and to chide her own vanity. "He doesn't know me. What on earth would make him fall in love with me?" she thought, reddening at the phrase itself; "well, at any rate, I shan't act as if I thought he was — it's silly!" But young Dodsley, in the honesty and transparency of his character, soon made the fact to be read by all that ran. He hung about the house and neighborhood; he spent his substance on candy and theatre tickets, on flowers and the latest novels; he went as far as he dared in speech only to be baffled by the boylike frankness of Letty's look and manner, about which there was to this young man something almost maddeningly sweet. He thought there never had been such a companion; how she listened! How she understood! How she saw the point of a joke! How ready she was to fall in with any mood! The infatuated youth could not have been made to believe that this polite pliancy meant nothing to Letty; she had an instinct for adapting herself to the companion of the hour. If she was a coquette, she defied all the established laws and traditions of coquetry; soft eyes and words she could not or would not understand. And when they were alone together in moments that seemed to her lover to throb with meaning, she remained on the surface, at least, unembarrassed and serene. Yet she liked him; Jack was a nice young fellow, and nobody could have helped liking him. He did not at all represent the Prince of whom every girl has her dreams; yet Letty sometimes found herself revolving the question, "If he ever *says* anything, what shall *I* say?" She was quite sure she would refuse

him, but the most agreeable course seemed to be to keep him from saying "anything" as long as she could.

And all this while poor old Mrs. Dodsley was drilling herself, in bitterness of heart, to accept what she thought of as the inevitable. Jack was in love, which from his grandmother's point of view was as good as saying Jack was married; any girl would jump at him. All her fine dreams about this event went to pieces before the dismal reality; she was divided between jealousy and the blind maternal desire for her boy to have what *he* desired, at whatever cost of pain to herself. She made her call ostensibly on Mrs. Breen, — really on Miss Breen, — dressed with anxious care in her best black, which was seven years old, and had been turned the other day for the second time, with a new ruche at the collar and sleeves and the brooch of jet set with diamonds and pearls that her husband gave her fifty-two years ago when Jack's father was born; her hands trembled as she set it in. How Time flies! She brought out the trinket only on great occasions. "... It's too elegant to be worn with propriety in our present circumstances," the old gentlewoman would say to herself gravely.

"Isn't she just *too* quaint?" Mrs. Tump Breen observed after the ceremony was over; "I wonder if we couldn't get her to come and act in the Mother Goose tableaux the children's Sunday-school is going to give. She'd make a perfectly splendid Mother Goose without any dressing up at all hardly — just a false nose or something like that."

"Oh, I — I don't think that she'd do it. I don't think she'd like being asked even," said Letty, quickly. The visit had gone off, strangely enough, after a highly satisfactory fashion to both the old lady and the young girl. Each one had been agreeably surprised, to discover that they touched at so many indefinable points. Boarding-house or no boarding-house, Mrs. Dodsley

corresponded to certain formless ideals of Letty's and, as it were, spoke to the girl in her own language. And Jack's grandmother, for her part, went home and discoursed about Miss Breen in a strain of enthusiasm that betrayed her relief. "Why, Jack, you never told me Miss Breen was *that* kind of a girl. Of course, I might have known you wouldn't pick out — I — I mean you wouldn't — wouldn't like any but a *nice* girl; only young men often make mistakes. But Miss Breen — why, she's not a bit *ordinary* —"

"Well, I should think *not!*" cried out Jack, red over his whole face; he understood what that overworked word meant to his grandmother, and resented it as if Letty had been called a scullion. "What put that into your head?"

"Well, it wouldn't have been surprising, you know, for her to have been just like the rest of them, Jack," said Mrs. Dodsley, meekly. "It's queer how often you see a good old family run down — get *common*, you know. But *this* one — why, her grandmother was a Miss Parrish of Richmond, one of those old Virginia Parrishes — that accounts for *her*, of course — Letty, I mean, being brought up so well — she's a *real Breen*. I remember Mr. and Mrs. Edward Breen visiting the bishop's family here — your grandfather and I entertained for them. Letty's named for her — Letitia Parrish. She was so interested when we found all this out — and so was I, Jack. I don't see how she *stands* that Mrs. William Breen; but I suppose she can't help herself."

"I *thought* you'd like her," said Jack, proud and pleased.

His grandmother looked at the young fellow fondly, thinking how handsome, manly, and spirited he was — how good he would be to the fortunate woman he married. He had never given *her* a moment's anxiety in his life — as, indeed, she had informed Miss Breen with

a good deal of impressiveness. The girl had listened with the proper interest; Mrs. Dodsley believed she appreciated him. The little old lady went up to her grandson and said in a broken and solemn voice — for was not this a kind of formal renunciation? — “I’m sure she’s a sweet girl, John, and will make you a good wife, and I h-hope you’ll be very happy, m-my dear!” said poor Maria, breaking into sobs at the last.

“Well, but — my goodness, I — I haven’t asked — I don’t know — she may not — I mean nobody’s said a thing about getting married *yet!*” protested the young man in mingled vexation, embarrassment, and shy hopefulness. “You — you oughtn’t to go on like this, without *knowing* anything!”

“Oh, I *know*,” said Mrs. Dodsley, with immense confidence and superiority. “Any *woman* would know. We can *read between the lines*. Whatever she says, it won’t be ‘no,’ Jack!” And the boy put his arms about her and kissed her.

Mr. Dodsley had by now got to a place where he could not be kept from “saying anything” much longer, as Letty observed with a certain dismay. The fact was so apparent that her uncle, Tom Breen, who turned up at this time, big and jocund as usual, filling the house with uproar and his sister-in-law’s soul with grim anxieties, — Tom Breen, whose strong, blue, unstable eyes saw everything, remarked openly that he thought that young Dodsley boy was going at a pretty good clip for a six weeks’ acquaintance! He also successfully touched Jack for a ten (to borrow one of the picturesque phrases of Mr. Breen’s own vocabulary) to supply a temporary inconvenience, as he was careful to explain, and took his leave shortly after. Could he have traded on this youth’s ingenuous eagerness to stand well with his sweetheart’s family? Who can say? Thomas was a diligent student of character; and, for

that matter, young Jack was at all times most kind, generous, and free-handed. And if ten dollars seems an almost pitifully small amount for a man of Mr. Breen's business abilities and opulent style to lack, it is to be remembered that every little helps.

It was that same night that Jack walked up to the Breen front door, and rang the nickel-plated gong affixed to the middle panel of it, resolved to put his fortune to the test. She loves me — she loves me not! Letty was in the parlor and came and opened to him herself with a little curtsy and expression of mock surprise.

"You were looking for me?" he asked as he followed her inside.

"Oh, no — but I knew your step."

"Did you really?" said Jack, happily and hopefully. Letty was alarmed by his eyes and tone.

"Why, yes, I always learn everybody's step, I don't know why. I always notice it somehow," she said in a matter-of-fact voice, and sat down by the lamp with her tatting. Her hands, which were thin and supple, and always very cool, darted to and fro above the long strip of white work and the spool dancing in her lap with motions oddly resembling her mother's, whom, however, the girl herself did not resemble in the least, and whom Jack Dodsley had never seen. But as Letty paused for an instant, holding out the piece at arm's length and studying it with her head a little tilted in an appraising attitude, the young man had a sudden powerful impression of having seen somebody somewhere that looked like her — he could not recall —. He spoke of it thoughtfully, knitting his brows.

"— And the queer thing is there isn't *anybody* like you. You're different from everybody else," he protested wonderingly.

"Maybe it was at the theatre or an illustration in a magazine," said Letty; "I believe every one has those

notions. I was born and brought up in the same place, and never saw anything else until I went to school. But when I was a little girl I used to think I could remember another place altogether different — a room and furniture, you know. Of course I must have seen it in some picture; our old house is crammed with pictures. I must have been a funny youngster, anyhow."

"I think you — you must have been a — a dear little girl," Jack declared warmly, and a trifle incoherently for so simple a statement. Letty looked at him with her frank, baffling gaze.

"Oh, no — just like any other child," she said straightforwardly; and the young man blushed his easy blush, looking down. Letty felt as if she had him once more well in hand, and could stave off a sentimental declaration indefinitely.

"This is awfully pretty, isn't it?" he said next, leaning over to pick up the flimsy ribbon of lace with reverent admiration. "It's wonderful how you do it. What's it for?"

"Well, house things, you know. Bureau scarfs and doilies and things like that. I'm making it for my aunt."

"*Your* house will be ever so pretty and dainty when — when you get married," said the young fellow, huskily, but looking her in the eyes again. He kept on fingering the fancy work mechanically.

"I hope so," said Letty, still airily secure in her ability to manage him. "You can't see the pattern very well that way, Mr. Dodsley. It shows best against something dark. Look at it now on your coat."

She laid it delicately along his arm. Letty did not know what prompted her to that foolhardy manoeuvre; she wondered afterwards. If she had been in love with Jack Dodsley, she would probably have shrunk, in a kind of terror of her own impulses, from touching him.

She had no conception of a man's passion, and it was only when she felt him tremble, and with shame and fright detected some excitement of her own senses, that she realized what she had done. The young man snatched at her hand and held it tight with an unconscious ferocity. "Letty — I —" he stammered, and his face was not red now, but white. "Letty —"

"No — no!" was all that Letty could say helplessly; her presence of mind, her cool self-control, entirely deserted her. "Please, Mr. Dodsley —!"

At the moment there came a charge of feet on the porch, and a terrific clamor at the bell. The Breen household, who had been playing "Authors" around the lamp on the dining-room table, went tumbling to the door. A youthfully gruff voice was heard to inquire if this was Brown's — if it was Miss Brown's?

"Lets! Lets! It's a special delivery for you," cried out Mrs. William, appearing on the parlor threshold; she excitedly held it out. "Come and sign — the boy says you've got to come and sign!"

It was in a handwriting quite strange to the girl. She opened it, startled, and glanced over to the signature. "Why, it's 'Lizbeth!" she said aloud. Vague dismay hung in the air. Even Jack, trying to steady his galloping pulses and bring himself back to earth, felt it, spite of his chagrin.

"Dear Letty," wrote 'Lizbeth, "I think you better come home. I think your Ma ain't so well, and, besides, we're going to have company. You should come home right away. Yours truly, Elizabeth Hurd."

CHAPTER V

'LIZBETH's plain utterances, backed by her evident hurry, had all the force of 'Lizbeth herself, and Letty, who was naturally submissive, set about obeying them without question, without even much speculation. She was not alarmed for her mother's health; that the seniors, who have ruled their lives so long, can ever lay down that sceptre, can sicken and grow old and go out of the world forever, is a thing hard for the average young person to believe, or picture. Letty knew her mother to be only forty-nine; if she had been eighty like Grandpa, there would have been something to worry about, the girl thought. But 'Lizbeth had started this scare groundlessly — as it would seem — once before; that part of the letter meant nothing, Letty was sure. The main and most disturbing matter was this "company" in prospect. "It must be Aunt Helen," Letty decided, amused if slightly troubled; she would have liked to see the old lady again, of whom she had a lively recollection, but what could they do with her? Their woman's household was conducted in a narrower fashion than during old Edward's time; there were no bills at the grocer's and butcher's nowadays, those gentry getting their infinitesimal orders paid from day to day; and daily the milkman collected his six cents from under the clean crock on the shelf outside the kitchen window. Letty conjured up a vision of Mrs. Von Donhoff (the *Frau Baron!*) amongst her pillows in bed at noon, in all the soiled richness of her negligé, sipping chocolate, and daintily disposing of broiled ham and omelet — "She won't get that now!" thought the girl with an involuntary smile. She looked

up and met the eyes of a drummer in the seat across the aisle of the railway-car, staring admiringly and knowingly; Letty turned hastily to her window a little confused.

Once or twice on the journey she thought of Jack Dodsley with an uneasy start; the thing which she had read about in a hundred novels, and dreamed and wondered about had actually happened to her; in another second it would all have been out, he would have told her he loved her, asked her to marry him. She thought of marriage as do all girls, with a kind of thrilled curiosity; there it was, in a manner of speaking, hers for the taking, and the reflection undeniably tickled her vanity. She felt a certain pride in her command of the situation; she was not in love with him, she told herself — at least, she did not feel about Jack as he did about her, if that was any sign. Letty could not imagine herself looking or acting in any such way — “Mercy!” she ejaculated inwardly, crimsoning at the thought. It seemed to her at once foolish and violent, an ugly demonstration of that mysterious property called sex. All very well for a man — it was even possible they couldn’t help it, she considered sagely, but could any woman, were she ever so much in love, let herself go to that extent? Letty recoiled at the notion. Yet she liked Jack; and a flash of wonder sped through her at the discovery that although the young man must be five or six years older than herself, she thought of him with an affectionate indulgence as if he were a little boy.

Muskingum Street, the factory chimneys, the sagging stone wall around their old yard, all the familiar scene looking just as when she last saw it, put to flight some unquiet doubts she had begun to have towards the end of the journey. She ran up the steps quite lightly, and up on the porch, and was about to tap her usual signal on the decorated panes to the right of the

door when this was opened by 'Lizbeth, who seemed to have been on the watch, a thing Letty had never known her to do before. To show even so slight an interest in anybody, even in the child whom she had seen born and growing up, would have been contrary to 'Lizbeth's creed and habit. Reserve was in the very air of that house.

"Well, Letty!" she said in a lowered voice, but calmly as if the girl had merely stepped out in the yard or street for a moment; "you done right to come home. I thought you would. You've most gen'rally been a good child. You don't need to say nothin' 'bout my letter, you know."

"Why not? Doesn't Mother —? What's the matter?" said Letty, more startled by this greeting than by any outburst of hysterics, supposing 'Lizbeth to have been capable of such a thing; "what's happened? Is Mother *really* sick?"

"Nothin's happened — that is — don't take on and make a fuss!" said the older woman, drawing her inside and shutting the door gently. "Yer gran'pa — I mean yer maw — don't like any kind of fuss, you know that. She's in there — in her room. She knows you're coming — she knows I'd wrote. Only don't say nothin' 'bout the comp'ny. She — she wants to tell you that herself."

"Oh!" said Letty, thinking she understood. "Is it Aunt Helen, 'Lizbeth?"

"Huh? Aunt Helen?" repeated 'Lizbeth, blankly.

"Yes. Mrs. Von Donhoff — *you* remember? Is she coming?"

"Oh, *her*!" said 'Lizbeth, with impatience. "If 'twan't nobody but *her* —! No, 'tain't her, Letty. Yer maw'll tell you — go on in!" She pushed the puzzled girl toward her mother's door. It had remained closed all this time.

Letty went in. There was a bright sunlight, and although it searched all the corners of the clean, bare,

tidy room, revealing unsparingly the cracks and discolorations and worn spots of their ancient furniture and walls, the effect was not unkind; somehow the place had a soul; Letty felt a peace and dignity about it after the cheap, gay tastelessness of her aunt's home. Her first view of her mother cheered her unexpectedly. Mrs. Breen was sitting propped up in bed, in her white wrapper, with her neat, fair hair, her composed, fair face, the same as ever; the only thing that struck Letty with any sense of strangeness was the fact that her mother should be in bed at all, thus in the broad daytime, and that she had no sewing in her hands. Instead she was reading in a little book with white covers embossed in a rococo style with pink and gold ribbons and garlands; Letty could not remember ever to have seen it before, and she had a moment of wonder over it even as she went up and kissed her mother. The meeting was self-contained on both sides; Letty would scarcely have known how to express the relief she felt, bound as she was by a lifelong discipline; and Mrs. Breen returned her kiss and surveyed her with a kind of restrained satisfaction. "It was just as well you came home, Letty. You'd really been there long enough," she said. And then: "What did 'Lizbeth say in her letter? Nothing upsetting, I hope?"

"Just for me to come home," said Letty, guarding her words; "and that you weren't feeling well." She glanced over the thin figure which hardly seemed to raise the bed clothing, at the slender face among the pillows. Mrs. Breen's appearance would not have been reassuring to any experienced eye; but Letty had never known her mother to be anything but thin, and at the moment, she thought she had seldom seen the other's gray-blue eyes look so large, clear, and brilliant. "You're all right now, aren't you?" she asked hopefully; "I mean the worst of it's over, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think so," her mother said; from time to

time she coughed. "I wish you'd please give me a tablet out of that bottle on the table, Letty."

"Are they for a cold? Was it a cold you had?"

"No. Something else — but it's over now. These things are to stop the pain. They make me very comfortable," said Mrs. Breen, with that tranquil air of finality which had always silenced Letty when she was a child. It silenced her now. The girl was so used to the idea of a Spartan endurance of suffering, having been trained to it herself, and seen numberless exhibitions of it, that it did not occur to her to press her questions. Nobody must talk about his own illnesses, nor about other peoples' — it was disagreeable and uninteresting, and, in fine, underbred. Her mother picked up the book with its ornamented cover, and held it out to her with a little smile. "You never saw that before? It's a gift book — the 'Garland of Friendship,' see? People used to make presents of them years ago. It was the fashion when I was about your age." She paused, and added with an effort which to Letty had the strange effect of being as much mental as physical; "your father gave me this."

Letty took the book and turned it over, diffidently curious. The mention of her father embarrassed her, she hardly knew why — perhaps because it was so unusual. Mrs. Breen moved restlessly, and the girl, raising her eyes, found her mother's large blue ones fastened on her with a singular expression intent yet distant, like the eyes of a portrait.

"You've never heard me speak of your father — that is, not often, Letty?"

"Why — why — no — I — I don't remember —" Letty stammered, somehow feeling herself at fault.

"You've never asked any questions about him."

"Well, I didn't know — I suppose I've always thought I oughtn't to — Grandpa didn't like one to ask too many questions, you know —"

"It's just as well — I shouldn't have known how to answer," said Mrs. Breen, with a slight gesture as of defeat. "I used to be glad you didn't seem to have any curiosity about him. Of course, you never were with other children, or with anybody who would have put it into your head to ask."

"Oh, yes, they used to ask at school," said Letty, eager to be honest; "sometimes the girls wanted to know what he did — I mean what business he was in. I always told them the plain truth. I said I didn't know, because he died before I was born."

Her mother made an abrupt movement. "Who told you that?"

"Why — why —" Letty stopped in bewilderment, on finding that she had no recollection. She searched her memory fruitlessly, and began again: "I don't know — it must have been you or — no, I'm sure it wasn't Grandpa. Why, Mother, it's the queerest thing, but I can't remember — I just seem to have known it always. You must have told me yourself."

"No," Mrs. Breen said again with visible effort. She seemed to gather herself together for an instant, and went on resolutely: "I didn't tell you that, Letty. You imagined it somehow, and I let you go on believing it. But I never deliberately told you anything that wasn't true."

"Anything that wasn't *true*?" echoed the girl, automatically.

"Your father didn't die before you were born. Your father isn't dead, Letty," said Mrs. Breen, distinctly.

There was a silence. Letty sat motionless; her very mind was standing still. Mrs. Breen looked at her with a face of tortured anxiety. "Letty! 'Lizbeth!" she cried out in a sharp whisper, raising herself on one elbow. The movement made her flinch, and at sight of that, the girl's self-command in part, at least, returned.

"Don't move, Mother, that hurts you, I know it," she said quickly, controlling her voice and manner after a fashion that unconsciously repeated the older woman's determined calm. "I'm all right. Don't move!"

Mrs. Breen fell back on the pillows with a gasp. "I thought you were going to faint," she said. "It couldn't be helped — you had to be told."

In another minute of silence Letty gathered resolution to ask: "What was the matter? Is he — wasn't he — did he — does he have to stay anywhere?"

Their eyes met comprehendingly. "No, it's not *that*. It's nothing like *that*," said the mother; "there isn't anything *wrong* with him — there never was. He didn't have to — to be kept anywhere. He's here now."

"*Here?*"

"Yes. Not in the house just now, but he will be any moment. I told him to go away for a little while, so I could tell you, and let you have a chance to — to get over it — to get used to it. That was the real reason I wanted you to come home. I wanted to tell you about it myself. You might hear some other way, and I wanted to tell you first. You mustn't worry about my being sick, Letty. I suppose 'Lizbeth frightened you, but I'm really not very sick. You mustn't mind what 'Lizbeth says."

A dozen questions rose to the girl's lips; the very confusion of them, joined to a certain fear of coming revelations, kept her from uttering any one. There was so much she wanted to know, which she somehow felt it would be inhuman to ask. That the secret should have been guarded from the one person whom surely it most concerned all these twenty years, pointed to tragedy and disgrace; all her poor edifice of family pride trembled to its foundations.

"Does — does anybody else know?" she managed to ask at last.

"All your father's own family, of course. Nobody outside — at least, they're all dead now, I think —"

"Not Aunt Hattie, Mother — *she* doesn't know?" Letty interrupted in sharp entreaty. There was something monstrous to her in the idea of her uncle's wife being so far privileged; poor Mrs. William Breen was not a person in whom anybody would choose to confide.

"No, no, *she's* never been told," said her mother, hastily, some answering feeling showing momentarily in her own colorless face; "I meant your father's brothers, and Aunt Helen and Bishop Breen and his wife. The other people are all dead — the ones that knew about it when it happened —" the look on the young face arrested her; then she repeated steadily — "when it happened. You guessed that something must have happened, Letty?"

"Yes. What was it?" said Letty, with almost equal steadiness. At the moment, the two women, who had not a feature in common, looked startlingly alike; their voices took the same inflections.

"It was when we were living in Pittsburg. You were not quite three. Your father had a position in the post-office. He'd been there for a good while, I don't quite know how long — he had it before — before we — before we were married —" Mrs. Breen began in a firm voice. At the last words it faltered suddenly into silence; she put her frail hands up to her face. "What is it, Mother? Mother, what hurts you? Tell me what to do!" Letty cried out in alarm. Never in all her life could she remember to have seen her mother shed a tear, and the sight terrified her.

"Nothing's hurting me, Letty. I — I was just thinking," said Mrs. Breen, resolute again; but she was silent for a minute or two, lying with her head turned away. The young girl had not the dimmest understanding of what might be passing through her mother's mind; but I think some of us would have known —

I think you and I would have known. Good God, how many idle parades of ghosts have we not all witnessed — ghosts of old, old hopes and illusions, and desperate, waning beliefs !

“We — we had a very nice house, Letty, and lived nicely. I had 'Lizbeth. She came to me quite a young girl from the country, and I took her and trained her. We lived very nicely — the house was pretty. I — I didn't know, you see, Letty — I thought your father was making a great deal of money. I knew his salary wasn't very large, but I thought he made money outside by — by investments. He used to talk about stocks and — and shares — he and your Uncle Tom. They — I suppose they speculated. Your father used to tell me to get anything I wanted ; I thought we had plenty of money — I didn't know. We really hadn't anything. Your father took some money — some of the Government money — he meant to put it back, Letty ; he didn't mean to *take* it — only the speculation went wrong, and it was all lost.”

“Uncle Tom knew ?” Letty heard herself say.

“No, he didn't know anything about where the money came from. He didn't have anything to do with taking it. It was his speculation ; but he didn't know anything about your father's money. You mustn't blame *him*,” said Mrs. Breen, anxiously.

“Then what happened ?”

“They found it out, of course ; the officials found it out. Your father went away when he heard they were going to examine everybody's books. I didn't know even then, Letty. I didn't suspect anything. He came home very late one night. I remember we waited supper a long while, and he didn't come, so I put you to bed, and then 'Lizbeth and I waited a little longer, and still he didn't come, so we had our supper. We didn't think anything of it ; sometimes he had to stay late at work. But this time he didn't get home till midnight, and then

he told me he was in a great hurry, because he must get ready and take a night train — that they were going to send him away on a long business trip. I asked where, and he said it was Government business, so he wasn't allowed to tell anybody, not even me; but he'd write me from the first place he stopped. I believed him, Letty. We went upstairs, and he got out the valise himself. I remember 'Lizbeth had brought up the clean wash that very afternoon, and I thought it was so lucky because I could put in all his shirts. You were in your little crib, and waked up and cried because it was cold — the fire had gone out. What is it?"

Letty had stirred and uttered an ejaculation. "*That's* what I remembered!" she said, staring with big eyes; "*I knew* I remembered!"

"I don't see how you could, child, you were such a little tot. 'Lizbeth always told you you were born here. I used to hear her, and I — I let you believe that, too," said Mrs. Breen, moving her hands restlessly; "it seemed best while you were so little."

"Then 'Lizbeth knows all about it, too?"

"Oh, yes. She wouldn't leave me — I don't know why. I don't think it was because she cared so much about us. I believe it was more habit than anything else," said Mrs. Breen, with the shadow of a smile. "*She would* stay. Your father went away, and in two or three days it all came out. There wasn't much in the papers, though. I believe the Government people wanted to keep it as quiet as possible so that they or the — the detectives, you know, could — could do their work better. They came to me to find out where Harry had gone — and I couldn't tell them — some of them didn't believe me —" her voice failed again. Letty understood this time; she put out her hand and stroked her mother's arm gently — rather timidly, in fact, for caresses were not frequent between them.

"Don't tell any more, Mother. I — I guess I know

all the important part now, don't I? And I don't believe it's good for you to talk about it."

"No, no, I ought to tell you the whole thing. You ought to know about Bishop Breen. He was a good man, Letty; your uncle was a good man. When he heard, he went to the President, and — and I don't know what he said or did — I always supposed he paid the money, or made some kind of a — of a compromise — some arrangement. Anyway, they let me alone at last. They said Harry — your father wasn't to be prosecuted. But Bishop Breen never let me know what he did — nobody ever said a word about it. And I never saw him to thank him. When he left you that money in his will, I didn't want to take it. I thought we'd had enough from him already, but your Aunt Charlotte made me. She was very good to me; everybody in your father's family has always been good to me."

"What did Grandpa — ?" Letty was beginning, when her mother went on almost as if she had not spoken.

"Your grandfather was kind to me, too. When he found I didn't have anything, and didn't know where to go or what to do, he made me come here. He said this was the place for his son's wife. He always pretended that he was glad to have us, and that I was the same to him as his own daughter, and that we weren't any extra expense. He was always praising the way I kept house, you remember, and saying what a manager I was. He never found fault with anything. That sounds trivial — but, you know, Letty, when people live together, it's harder somehow to be polite all the time than it is to be kind."

"I think you worked pretty hard," said Letty, dryly. "He never did anything."

"There wasn't anything he could do. And he couldn't have stopped me working, Letty — he couldn't help that. I felt as if I *must* — I *must* make some re-

turn." And the girl, trying to figure herself in her mother's position, felt the force of that argument. She looked at the sick woman dumbly sympathetic, pitying and regretful. Her mother must have been a pretty girl; for all these hard years she was pretty still, — but she must have been a pretty, slender, light-haired girl, not much older than Letty herself was now, gay, sweet, and happy, when this came and spoiled her life. What had the years done to *him*, Letty wondered; and was frightened at the surge of dislike accompanying the thought. How had he come back at last — poor, battered, old? Or prosperous and easy and mindful of his duties at this late hour? Either way she shrank from the notion of him.

"Is this the first — I mean, haven't you ever heard — ?" she said, hesitating in fear that the question might inflict some new pain — touch on some unhealed wound, for surely there must be many such. But Mrs. Breen answered calmly:—

"He wrote once — from Honduras. And six or seven years ago I got a letter from him; he had heard about your Uncle Sylvanus's death. He knew he could come back at any time — that nothing would be done to him. He's been here since Friday."

"What does he want here? What is he going to do?" said Letty, unconscious of the resentment in her voice.

"Nothing, Letty. He has a right here, you know. Don't — don't feel that way. It's your *father*, Letty."

The girl sat mute, appalled at the frigid injustice of Circumstance, angry yet helpless before the stern exactions of her own conscience. He was her father, and that bound her hands; whatever he was, whatever he had done or failed to do, that bound her hands.

At the end of a long silence her mother spoke again. "I ought to have told you before, Letty. But it was hard. At first you were too little to understand; and

when you began to grow up, it was harder still. I put it off. I didn't do right ; but it was so hard."

"You did do right, too !" Letty cried ; a desire to protect her mother against further suffering, further persecution, invaded her. For the moment their position almost seemed reversed, and there was something maternal in the strength and fierceness of her championship. "You *did* do right, Mother — you've always done right. Any time you chose to tell me would be the right time — or if you'd never chosen ! I don't want you to think that way — to — to reproach yourself. As if it hadn't been hard enough for you to stand anyhow !"

"I've tried," said Mrs. Breen, relaxing slightly among the pillows. Her voice was as distinct and governed as before, yet it suddenly seemed to Letty indefinably removed ; as if some impalpable barrier had all at once descended and encompassed the sick woman on her bed.

CHAPTER VI

GOING out of the sick-room, Letty was conscious not of having received a shock, nor of being frightened about her mother, nor of anger with her father, nor of contempt or curiosity — merely of an overwhelming anxiety to see him and have this meeting over and done with. She had all her grandfather's dread of a scene, of anything dramatic and hysterical; and impatiently wanted their lives to settle down and run in the accustomed grooves once more, wanted to resume her own familiar ways, wanted her mother to be well and back in her usual place and occupations. She was unable to imagine their household with a father added to it, a father whom she had never seen, and an hour ago had not known was in existence. A furtive hope lurked within her that he would not stay, would vanish harmlessly, and continue his career at a distance like Aunt Helen.

She glanced around the hall fearfully, and, with a mixture of relief and disappointment, saw nobody there. The door opposite opened into the room which had been her grandfather's; it was standing widely ajar, and Letty walked across and boldly pushed it open. There was the empty room, with its furnishings just as she remembered them all her life; the four-posted bed, the wardrobe, the tall mahogany shaving-stand with thin legs twisted like a rope and little drawers with greenish glass knobs. There was matting on the floor with some pieces of rag carpet bound with red braid and laid about here and there like rugs to cover the holes and worn places, as Letty knew. From the wall over the bed her

grandmother's portrait, in a short-waisted white dress with a high comb among her curls, smiled at the girl. The bed itself was disordered, and the pillows crushed as if somebody had been lying down after it was made — a spectacle at which Letty's tidy soul revolted. A purple flannel dressing-gown dangled by one of the bed-posts. On the shaky little old candle stand at the foot of the bed where her grandfather had been used to keep the Atlas and Webster's Dictionary there now lay a paper bag, torn open and showing its contents, two sticks of peppermint candy striped spirally in red and white; beside these an irregular square block of something that looked like fruit-cake, and another object at which Letty stared in wordless astonishment. It was a little wooden Noah's Ark, brightly painted in the traditional style; the lid was open, and two or three pairs of the animals had been taken out and ranged experimentally alongside, in accordance probably with the printed list provided by the German toy-maker whence the thing came; it lay there for reference — "*. . . zwei Elephanten . . . zwei Mäuse . . .*" — Letty read, and saw the elephants and the mice of an equal size and something the same shape paired off beside it. The atlas and dictionary had been laid on the floor to make room. There was a rusted old string of a black silk tie sprawling over the shaving-glass, a basinful of dirty water on the wash-stand. A peculiar aroma, penetrating and unpleasantly sweet, hung over everything; Letty sniffed it savagely.

She went up to the table and touched a finger gingerly to the cake of dark stuff; it was chewing-tobacco. Letty put the beasts back into their ark and snapped the cover down on them, laid the tobacco and the candy together in a drawer, and reinstated the books. She straightened up the bed and wash-stand. Coming in her tour to the shaving-glass, she at last located the source of that puzzling smell — a square bottle of rich

pink liquid with a glass stopper and an ornate flowered and gilded label : "*Elisir des Indes* for the Hair, Beard and Mustache. Stimulates, Revives, Invigorates, Restores to the Natural Color . . ." The girl eyed it thoughtfully ; it reminded her a little of Mrs. Von Donhoff. She surveyed the room again, marvelling that a few inconsiderable changes should so affect its character. In old Edward Breen's time, this place, like every other corner of the house, had exhibited the high simplicity of the old gentleman's own presence and manner ; why should a little disorder and a bottle of hair-oil so cheapen and disfigure it ? Letty retreated slowly.

She went to her own room, which was one of the series of three in the rear, and directly behind her mother's ; it was while she was changing her dress and rearranging the black hair at which she had often caught young Dodsley gazing so admiringly that she heard a man's voice in the next room. Letty's hand tightened on the brush-handle ; she stopped an instant, then went on with mechanical strokes. She could not distinguish any words ; but, apart from the unworthiness of eaves-dropping, the girl felt wildly that she did not want to hear what was being said — that she would like to be out of sight and hearing forever. These intimacies revealed the situation more clearly than any explanations of her mother's could possibly have done ; they filled the girl with poignant repugnance. For the moment, the whole institution of marriage, about which, nevertheless, she knew as little as any full-grown young woman could, seemed to her horrible. After a while she thought she heard her father go out of the room, to her relief. She could not have met him for the first time in *there*, at any rate, she told herself. The hall again was empty, when she had finished dressing ; but there were voices in the dining-room. She heard 'Lizbeth's. Letty braced herself once more, and opened the door.

It was supper-time, and 'Lizbeth had set the table,

with the lamp in the middle, and two plates and chairs; and there was a strong odor of coffee and frying meat. An elderly man with gray hair, and a profile like her grandfather's, was sitting there reading the evening paper. He looked up and then got to his feet as Letty entered, dropping the newspaper, which went slithering down amongst the tableware and knocked off a spoon or two with a clatter. The father and daughter stared at one another in a silence so long that at last the girl felt with a kind of impatience it was beginning to be ridiculous.

"How do you do?" she said resolutely; she realized the grotesque inadequacy of this greeting, but what would have been adequate?

The man put out his arms, with a step towards her. "Letty! My dear little Letty!" he said in a tremulous voice.

With a species of furious amusement, Letty felt herself somehow touched. His dear little Letty, forsooth! After twenty years of neglect and indifference, his dear little Letty! For all that, he was her father. What did she know about the way fathers felt? He looked old and broken; his face worked, and she saw a tear slide down.

"Aren't you — aren't you going to kiss me?" he said, and made a feeble gesture of resignation. "I suppose you think I don't deserve it."

Letty's humanity, as also her good breeding, commanded her to do what was expected of her. She went up and kissed him dutifully. His beard, which was not gray like his hair, but a preternaturally glossy and juvenile brown, exhaled a fine fragrance of *Elisir des Indes*.

It will have been noticed that, contrary to the principles and practice of melodrama, there was nothing at all romantic or sentimental about this meeting, from

Letty's point of view at any rate, although romance and sentiment might well have been expected. The girl's youthfully rigid standard of manners and personal dignity required her to look and act as if there were nothing to criticise nor to inquire about; she tried to behave as if the sudden appearance of an unsuspected father was the most everyday thing in the world, keeping constantly before her mind the fact that if her mother had no objection to make to him, she, Letty, could in conscience have none, either. He was her father; he was within his rights. And she must never forget that she was a lady. Her grandfather himself, that painstaking old exponent of theoretical aristocracy, would have admired her attitude. It was unnatural; but there was such a completeness and finish about its artificiality!

As for Mr. Henry Breen, this returned wanderer displayed, for his part, a truly Odysseus-like paternal and conjugal fondness. No lack of proper sentiment about *him*, anyhow! He was prodigal of petting and praising; admired Letty's hair, her eyes, her figure, her accomplishments, about which it seemed remarkable that he should know anything; her traits of character, which one might have supposed he would know still less. He told her with a sigh, and a tremolo in his voice that she recalled to him her mother at the same age — "Your poor mother — my poor Martha!" says Mr. Breen, with tears in his eyes, and swallowing his mouthful of pork-chop with difficulty. And he vaguely murmured something about misfortunes — the way of the world — sundered and drifting lives, etc., etc. To Letty's relief he made no more distinct reference, however, to his years of absence or their cause; *she* didn't want to hear about it, she thought. She had feared he would tell her or attempt some justification, and the girl felt her powers of pretence could not bring her to listen to *that* with complaisance. At the same time, Letty recognized a queer note of genuineness throughout all this emotional

effervescence; he was in earnest with his affection, his sorrows, his hopes, and regrets for the moment, at all events. Unobserved, she made a careful survey of him. Her father, she knew, could not be over fifty-five, but he looked older with his thin gray hair. He must have been very handsome in youth, resembling the rest of the family except for his large, soft, and gentle blue eyes, beside which Letty felt her own black ones must seem flinty-hard and severe. He was of tall and slender build like her grandfather, but stooped, and in some other indefinable way lacked the poise and presence of the older man. His manner subtly exaggerated old Edward's correct elegance; it was like a faint and extraordinarily simply conceived caricature, such as a child might draw. Letty noted the difference without being able to define it to herself; she wondered if it might not be partly because her father's appearance was so dingy. At the lowest ebb of his fortunes, her grandfather had never been that. But this man was not — not clean, to put it plainly; his clothes were not clean, his hands and nails were not clean. And there was the ghastly foppery of that dyed and perfumed beard!

He got up when the meal was finished, saying he guessed he'd get his tobacco; he always took a little chew of tobacco after eating; and put his arm affectionately around her shoulders as they left the room — "My own dear little girl!" Letty escaped from him at the door, which was not wide enough to let them through in this fashion. Her father went into his bedroom and came back laughing, with the Noah's Ark in his hand. "Look here, Letty, I forgot — I actually forgot, I didn't realize you must be grown up. I brought this for you — for a present, you know. Anyway, we can have some fun with it — pairing off the animals, hey? There's a list of 'em, and the fellow swore up and down they were all here, but, by George, I believe he's done

me out of some of 'em. I can't find any camels, for one thing. And here's some candy —" he held it out a little sheepishly — "I ate some of it myself, so there isn't as much as there ought to be. I didn't mean to, but you know how those things happen. I kept reaching into the bag for a stick, and reaching in and taking another stick, till the first thing you know there weren't but two left! You take *those*, anyhow." He looked at her anxiously. "Don't you want it? Don't you like it, Letty? It's good candy."

For a flash of time, the girl felt immeasurably sorry — for him — for herself — for all of them — she did not know why. "Oh, yes, I like it; I'm sure it's very nice," she said kindly and warmly enough; "but I think I'd better go and sit with Mother now. I — I don't believe I have time for the Noah's Ark."

His face fell. He had already begun to take the animals out, but crammed them back in regretful haste. "Oh, of course, your mother! She's not feeling very well."

Thus was Mr. Harry Breen restored to his family and introduced to his daughter. To find him, instead of the hardy, adventurous, and sinister scoundrel of her half-formed expectations, an amiable personage, unduly aged, and mildly appealing, was not so gratifying to Letty as may have been imagined. A rascal who went in daily risk of the Penitentiary, or with a price upon his rascally head, she might have feared and hated, but she also would have respected after a sort. It would at least have argued some spirit and contrivance in him, but this poor creature —! He was only something to be taken care of and borne with patiently. Letty disdained to ask, but for that matter it soon became abundantly evident to her that her father, whatever had been his circumstances and however he had managed to get along in the interval, had come home without a penny to his name and without the slightest

disposition to earn any. Apparently his return had been prompted not by any late-born sense of duty, but by some instinct akin to that of the tired, homing animal, trustfully expecting food, shelter, kindness. That he got it, even from this hard young girl, without question and without reference to the past or his deserts, only offers one more example of the age-old privilege of the weak.

Mr. Breen never volunteered any details of his recent career ; with the tacit consent of everybody in the house, that subject was let alone. After all, of what use to rake over those ashes now ? He had come home and meant to stay — what difference did it make to a soul on earth where he had been or how he had fared in the meanwhile ? The three women philosophically accepted him as he was, without comment even to one another. Letty would have thought it beneath her to discuss him with 'Lizbeth, who, if an old, trusted, and valued servant, was still a servant ; very likely 'Lizbeth had her own pride about the matter, too. And after the first day, no more talk about him passed between the girl and her mother. Indeed, the latter was too ill, as even Letty's inexperienced eyes could discern, for much talk of any kind ; the daughter had moments of dark apprehension which she fought off with a kind of frenzy of denial and disbelief. She found her surest escape from them in the same desperate activities to which her mother had resorted ; it was wonderful how much she did about the house and sick-room. Mrs. Breen herself could not have surpassed her in the speed, dexterity, and thoroughness with which Letty went about her multiple self-imposed tasks. And her father remarked on her helpfulness with exuberant and probably quite sincere admiration.

He himself, in justice it should be said, added as little as any man could to her work and responsibilities. He was as affectionate and docile as a poodle, moving aim-

lessly and quietly around the house, and dozing in an arm-chair in any corner, coming promptly to the table for his meals, whereof he always ate abundantly, pronouncing them the best cooked and seasoned that anybody ever tasted. He ran all the errands, and did all the odd jobs that required a man's strength; in the beginning he tried to be of use with the invalid, awkwardly shifting her pillows and reading the paper aloud to her in a slow, monotonous, and hesitating voice, from the first page to the last, including all the advertisements and police-court news, and generally falling asleep over it towards the end. He was not much of a reader, it appeared, seldom opening a book for his own entertainment; and these ministrations soon ceased. At first he would wander into his wife's room, sit for a while and wander out again once or twice a day, then, at gradually lengthening intervals, until, rather to every one's relief, he scarcely came at all. Sometimes, when he came in from his journeys down street to the drugstore or grocery, he brought pop-corn balls rolled in waxed paper and little bags of hot roasted peanuts — "For a little treat for your mother — to tempt her appetite, you know. Kind of worries me that she don't eat more," he explained to Letty. Mrs. Breen used to receive the gifts with her patient smile; and he ate them himself afterwards with a look of vague content. Letty wondered savagely if this fulfilled his notion of providing for his family, and if he had always been so silly. Was he ever young, active, quick-witted, forcible, the girl used to speculate? Was it only his good looks that had attracted her mother? The idea repelled her. Now that he was an aging, dull, untidy, lazy man, worthless and dishonored, and who had wronged her, what did her mother think of him? What did he think of himself? She had her doubts if he ever thought at all.

In fact, for all his colorlessness and pliability, Mr. Breen occasionally comported himself after a manner

which, to Letty's femininely fastidious mind, should have been impossible for any gentleman, let alone a Breen. She was indifferent to his being silly at home, but winced at seeing him, to her mind, silly abroad. He seemed to have a feeble fondness for dress, in spite of his worn, dusty, stained old coats and broken boots, in spite of the shirts and collars which he did not change often enough; he wore a large, glassy paste jewel in the forefront of his gloomy-hued linen, a glittering red stone of unknown variety on his little finger; there was a hideous green and yellow spotted cravat he liked to sport on Sundays when he made a toilet, and applied the hair-oil. Besides this, his social tastes, as they presently developed, dismayed his daughter as much as they angered her. In some way inexplicable to Letty, he struck up an acquaintance with many of their Second Street neighbors, loitering along the sidewalk and exchanging affable gossip with them, even returning home smelling of friendly glasses of beer and bologna sausage sandwiches partaken of at Mike's Place, Clancy's Place, Heaven knows who's Place. Once — shade of old Edward Breen! — Letty, hearing a strange voice on the porch, and going out, found a burly, middle-aged lout, one of the factory hands, collarless, unshaved, in sour shirt-sleeves, sprawled over the steps beside her father, both of them chewing diligently. Disproportionate rage, disgust, indignation, filled the girl. Yet that idea of duty which is nothing but a sort of exalted selfishness kept her from any outbreak. At all costs she must have her own good opinion.

"Who was the man you invited in last night?" she asked him afterwards — courteously, as always.

"That? Oh, that's Ben Rudd — he's a plain man, but a kind of a rough diamond, you know, Letty. I like to hear him talk — we talk politics. We're both Democrats, but he has some Socialistic tendencies that I'd like to get out of his head," her father explained

eagerly. Then he added in a tone of apology, "You know, Letty, it's a little — a little lonesome for me sometimes not having anybody — any man, I mean, to talk to."

"I think you'd better not have any strangers in while Mother's so sick, had you?" Letty said in her governed voice. He acquiesced hastily and humbly; and that afternoon Letty caught sight of him coming along the street from an errand in company with a young woman about her own age in a bright-flowered challis dress, with a phenomenally small waist, a buxom figure, and a shock of black bangs under her pink tulle hat. Mr. Breen was gallantly carrying a bundle which he surrendered to her at the gate, and they parted with giggles.

"That's Belle Dulaney, the restaurant man's daughter down on Market Street, you know — pretty little thing, isn't she? Her manner reminds me of you, Letty, and she has black hair just like yours, did you notice it?" said her father, innocently.

This sort of incident occurring more than once, Letty contrived after a while to get used to it, or, at least, to witness it with a chilly and acrid amusement instead of the annoyance she had at first found it so hard to restrain. What would you have? she could say to herself with a mood and gesture quite after the taste of her aunt, Mrs. Von Donhoff. Fortunately, there was nobody to be offended by it but herself; 'Lizbeth didn't count, 'Lizbeth *knew*; and Letty's mother had by this reached a stage where nothing in this world would matter much to her, whether for good or evil, pain or joy. She used to lie silent for long hours, with her hands folded, her large, clear eyes fixed and steady, yet somehow looking nowhere; she never questioned or commented on her own condition. Sometimes she had attacks of intense pain, generally at night when 'Lizbeth insisted on taking charge of her; indeed, the sick woman herself expressly stipulated that the time of



her nurses was to be thus divided. "Letty must have some rest — the child doesn't know yet — it's going to be so hard for her —" she said to 'Lizbeth, and the other nodded comprehendingly. To the very end the three women kept up the fiction that Letty didn't know!

"Miss Breen doesn't realize that her mother can't get well, I suppose. She's very young," the doctor said tolerantly and sympathetically to 'Lizbeth.

"No use telling her, is there?" the servant said briefly.

The girl knew only too well — knew long before she would admit it to herself. She acted ignorance with a spontaneity, an ingenuity, a fertility of invention, a gallantry of self-control that would have been the despair of the greatest artist that ever trod the boards. "If it makes Mother any happier to think I don't know she's dying — well, then, it's *right*!" she used to reflect. At night she laid awake, cringing helplessly, listening to the half-articulate gasps which nothing but an extreme of torment could have forced from those resolute lips — and in the morning would enter the room, fresh, light-footed, with an unshadowed face, sanguine and gay.

"I hope I — I didn't keep you awake last night, did I, Letty? I — I was a little uncomfortable, but you weren't disturbed, were you?" the mother would say, with anxious eyes strained to read the girl's face. And Letty, who could have screamed aloud and wrung her hands in unavailing pity, would answer with exactly the right proportion of surprise and concern: "Why, Mother, were you sick in the night? Why didn't you call me, or make a noise?"

In counting up afterwards, Letty discovered with a weary surprise that there had been five or six weeks of this. It must have gradually grown worse towards the end, but she found herself incapable of judging. Perhaps in a sense she had actually got used to this part

of her life, too. It was about three o'clock in the morning when she waked to hear that wretched conflict for the last time. She sat up in bed as she heard 'Lizbeth with an altogether new note of fright and supplication in her voice: "Oh, let me call Letty! Oh, I'd *ought* to call Letty — I'd *ought* to call her!"

"No, no, let the poor child sleep!" said Mrs. Breen.

Letty ran out into the hall; her father was snoring in his bed. She hesitated a second — but why wake him? She opened the door of her mother's room gently, and went in, prepared to assume her mask of unsuspecting ignorance — with some light explanation ready on her lips. But there was no need; the stage was empty, the poor comedy ended, and the curtain down on it forever.

CHAPTER VII

THE shabbily tragic circumstances of Mrs. Breen's death, — which, indeed, if the truth had been known, were not nearly so tragic nor so shabby as her life had been, — as soon as they became known, moved all the Breen family, and many of the humble neighbors round about Muskingum Street and the outlying slums to demonstrations of kindness and good feeling that surprised and touched Letty. People came in; two or three of the factory women offered help; the unspeakable Miss Dulaney brought a bunch of flowers. The volunteers were of very little use, but at least they meant well. They whispered with 'Lizbeth in the kitchen, casting looks of curiosity and awe at the thin young woman with the black dress and black hair and motionless, delicately colored face, who went silently to and fro in the shadowed rooms, who thanked them in such a grave and steady voice. Most of them agreed that she "didn't seem to feel it much," and that she was the speaking image of the old gentleman Breen, and had just his ways.

Miss Breen's bearing was not such as to arouse sympathy; it was not in her character to ask it, and she scarcely knew how to receive it. Mr. Breen, on the other hand, was quite ready for consolations, and would have liked a little company; his wife's death, which, he anxiously explained to whomsoever would listen, was totally unexpected and a terrible shock to him, having thrown him into a tremulous state of fright and apprehension on his own account, during which he made frequent applications to the whiskey-and-water, and

spent a good deal of time feeling his pulse. Nevertheless, he remained in a kind of semi-seclusion something like his daughter's. To tell the truth, our amiable friend, Henry Breen, was more or less afraid of the girl; her steady, measuring glance, her ice-clad civility, frightened him. He timidly imitated her reserve as far as was possible to him, in terror of offending her. Whatever had been Mr. Breen's temper in his youth, time, and perhaps the grinding experiences of late years, — who knows what they were? how stern, or how debasing? — had worn away and destroyed the last remnant of a man's spirit in him; and perhaps one cannot feed on husks for any length of time without acquiring some liking for, and likeness to, one's fellow-banqueters. He wept abundantly upon hearing of his wife's death — a sight which, she did not know why, dried Letty's own tears at once. She did not cry again through all the dreary hours of waiting and unhappy preparation. She was benumbed, not with a sense of her bereavement, for she could hardly believe in that yet, but with that strange feeling of release from anxiety, of pain and futility and impotent resentment, which visits most of us, in like case.

The family themselves, as has been said, were active in good offices and attentions; they were great people to hang together. Cousin Eliza wrote; old Cousin Augustus, who was ninety if he was a minute, and whom Letty had almost forgotten, wrote also, in a cramped, up-and-down hand, to say that he had always had a great respect for Mrs. Martha Breen, and regretted her demise, and did anybody know anything about Harry, or where he was? Thomas Breen wrote from Cripple Creek; he could not get to the funeral, owing to the absolute necessity of his being on the spot to look after his investments; but he trusted Letty would understand. He felt very badly about poor Martha; and give his love to Harry and tell him Tom was glad he

had come back home. William Breen came over from Columbus and took charge; he was very kind, with his serious, lined face and his spectacles through which he looked rather hard and carefully at his brother, whom he also had not seen for twenty years. William was a silent man; so that it would be difficult to say whether he avoided much conversation with Harry out of habit or deliberate intention. He patted Letty on the back by way of showing his sympathy; and thereafter gave his whole mind to the funeral arrangements, which he carried through with entire precision and decency. Mrs. William had an attack of grippe — providentially, as Letty thought with shamed relief — and so was prevented from appearing, although the funeral party stayed at the little State Street house; and the children greatly enjoyed the leave of absence from school, the ride out to the cemetery, and the ceremonies there.

Letty remembered the place from the one other occasion when she had been there; there were new grave-stones since that day; the lot was in order now. And a handsome obelisk reared itself up against the background of hillside, in memory of Bishop Breen and his wife — “Charlotte Riggins, born June 20, 1805. Died January 4, 1886.” Letty recalled her not without a certain warmth of feeling; poor old thing, poor, homely, old woman, she had been kind to them, kind and generous. The girl thought of that other journey out here; of the bishop’s funeral and the reading of the will. It was ten years. What had become, what was becoming, of all those people? “For I am a stranger and a sojourner as all my fathers were —” Her grandfather was lying under the stone yonder by his wife’s side. Now her mother, too. An appalling sense of loneliness descended upon Letty. She looked at her father standing near with his hat off and the wind lifting the long, thin strands of his dull hair; it was a clear and



sharp autumn day, and the sunlight dwelt unkindly on his figure, on his mild eyes, his dyed beard, his face of conscious gravity like a child's. His dress was shabby and disordered, but that, of itself, would have meant nothing to Letty, if it had not seemed to her that a shabby and disordered spirit showed through every fold of it; his soul was as unkempt as his body. Merciful Heaven, she must live all the rest of her life with this weak, pitiful, slow-witted, unclean old man! With terrifying clearness of vision she saw herself growing old, growing like him, through endless years of poverty and hopeless struggle. It was her duty; what else? She was his daughter, and what should she do but feed him, work for him, comfort him? Horror and rebellion shook the girl. How was it her duty, she cried inwardly. What was he to her, or what had he ever done for her to give him a claim on her life? It was wrong, it was unjust in the sight of God. She calmed down, thinking with a kind of wretched mirth that, at any rate, she had no choice but to live at home, and live with her father. There was nothing else open to her. "Eh, this *bon Dieu*, people are always running to *him* with their affairs," Mrs. Von Donhoff used to say, and wave her fan; "yet the Devil has so much more executive ability!"

One humble member of this funeral gathering, who was not much noticed by anybody, and who indeed "knew her place," as she herself would have phrased it, and would not have dreamed of putting herself forward, was poor 'Lizbeth Hurd, in her black gown and her old black cotton gloves hanging off at the finger-tips. 'Lizbeth scarcely said a word, and was not seen to shed a tear, but she performed all the dreary offices of which the dead stand in need, with a species of fierce fidelity, quite scaring off the undertaker's men; she was up all night and all day; she cooked,

cleaned, and set the house in order with a fanatical zeal; and, at the end, grimly insisted on paying her own railroad-fare and other expenses in order to be present, although William Breen urged them upon her out of his own pocket. It fell out, luckily enough, that Mrs. William was without servants at the time, being seldom comfortably provided in that respect, so that 'Lizbeth's unsociable and unamiable presence was, after all, tolerably welcome in the cluttered, helter-skelter kitchen. "She's horrid ad cross ad never opeds her bouth, ad scrubs, scrubs, all the tibe, bud I'll be sure she's bedder thad nobody!" said Mrs. William, whose grippe had ascended to her head and nose in great force. 'Lizbeth never delivered herself of any opinion regarding the lady of the house during the entire fortnight of her stay there; and Mrs. Breen was astounded to observe that there was so little of the confidential and familiar in the manner of Letty and the old servant towards each other.

"Twenty years?" she exclaimed, lost in curiosity; "did you say you'd had her *twenty years*?"

"Yes. Since before I was born," Letty told her; "we've never had anybody else that I remember."

"Well, I should think she'd be more motherly after all that while — and since you were a *baby*!"

"I don't believe she knows how to be motherly, and I'm not sure that I'd like her to be, anyhow," said Letty, with a half smile; "'Lizbeth and I are very good friends — as much friends as people can be in our positions, I suppose."

Her aunt eyed the girl, almost revolted by what seemed to her an unnatural coldness. Mrs. Tump herself knew no halfway measures of affection or kindness; having someway got the idea that her new brother-in-law — the tale of whose misdoings was, in fact, sufficiently uncertain as to detail, and far-away as to time and place — was a sort of Enoch Arden to

be sympathized with and cherished, she welcomed that wanderer with a warmth which, I fear, Mr. Henry Breen had not received at his own home. He made a by no means uncongenial member of Mrs. William's group, playing all manner of games with the children, always willing and smiling, if a little indolent, amazingly easy to entertain, listening by the hour to his hostess's eager talk. Mr. Breen heard all about the iniquities of the grocer's boy, the intrigues of Mrs. Breen's last "girl" with the lady next door, the outrageous injustice of Bubba's teacher in sending the young gentleman home from school with a note complaining of his behavior and Mrs. Breen's rejoinder, the quarrel between two young ladies of the Row, and whose side Mrs. Tump took and why, — Mr. Breen heard it all with a flattering attention.

They got along very well without Letty, before whom, in her black clothes, even her aunt felt some embarrassment. The girl knew it, and used to go out of the room and out of the house, and leave them in freedom. She never mentioned her loss; when she cried, as she sometimes did, it was at night and secretly, her strong pride governing her still. She hid away with her pain like some wild animal. "Aunt Hattie would be wanting to come and *sympathize*, and I couldn't stand that," thought Letty. "Why should I talk about it — what good would that do?" she said to herself; "it doesn't make any difference to *him*. He would whimper around about his poor Martha — stuff! What did he care for his poor Martha? It doesn't make a bit of difference to a soul except me and poor old 'Lizbeth. They're all kind — they want to be kind. I don't want to spoil their fun. It's better to keep away and not remind them of unpleasant things."

Perhaps her uncle, William Breen, came nearer to divining her than any one. It was he who had insisted on their staying with his own family for a few days rather

than return at once to the empty house on Muskingum Street. "It's pretty hard on you, Letty," he said awkwardly; "better stay here awhile till you — till you kind of get used to it, you know. Can't put *us* out any, because your old woman — what's her name? — Lizzy? — She's a perfect godsend!" he added, soberly humorous. Letty agreed to the arrangement; she was weary of deciding, weary of planning and contriving, worn out with her miserable pretences of the past weeks. Her future seemed so ugly and dismal she was glad to avert her mind from it. Once, indeed, she said diffidently to her uncle that she would like to get something to do.

"Something to *do*?" he repeated with a puzzled look; "what do you mean?"

"I mean I'd like to do something to make some money. We haven't anything," said the girl; "do you think I could get anything?"

"Oh!" said her uncle, and then was thoughtfully silent awhile. "Office work, hey?" he inquired at last; "do you know anything about figures or shorthand?"

"No. But I — I could learn, couldn't I?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I suppose you could learn," said William, without enthusiasm. He was silent again. "The fact is, Letty," he finally said, unwillingly, "I — I don't much believe in women in business — around in offices and men's places, you know, and — and all that. I wasn't brought up that way — I guess I'm kind of old-fashioned, but I don't like it. It's a hard life — a dog's life. I don't think women — girls like you, I mean — ought to work that way. I think they'd better stay at home. Home's the place for women." He paused. "Now I can afford to give you a little something to live on, you know, and I guess your Uncle Tom can once in a while, too. I guess you can get along on it, and not go to any offices. You

wouldn't get paid enough to keep you in shoe-leather; and if you don't know anything about the work, anyhow —" He looked at her dubiously, fearful of having hurt her feelings. "Better just stay at home, and get married by and by like the rest of the girls," he said kindly. "That's what girls ought to do." And having got through this exposition of his views in unquestionably the longest speech he was ever known to make, Mr. Breen hastily put on his hat and overcoat and took the down-town car, feeling that he had successfully closed that incident. In fact, Letty accepted his dictum pliantly enough; she was not at all confident of her own abilities, and had not much originality or initiative.

That afternoon, on her daily lonesome walk, and feeling perhaps a little more lonesome than usual, Letty, wandering among the unfinished sidewalks, the fresh foundations, clay banks, and brick-heaps of a new subdivision out towards the East End of town, fell in with Mr. John Dodsley. His presence in this out-of-the-way locality may be accounted for (lo, the novelist knows everything!) by the fact that all these half-done sidewalks, foundations, etc., were on a piece of property belonging to the Riggins Estate — part of the old Gates farm, to be exact — which was in process of being opened up and improved. You may discern the outlines of it now, on a casual exploration of that quarter of the city — Charlotte Street, Bishop's Place, Gates Avenue, the names will identify it, as also the style of architecture, which is mostly "Queen Anne," — all over gables, crooked chimneys, and miniature windows. They used to build that way about '90 or '91. I have been told the Estate made a very profitable speculation out of this subdivision, what with sales, ground-rents, and one thing or another; it's all gone now — sold, divided up — what do I know? Jack, who was a handy man to have about an office, had been



sent out to see what the contractors were doing. He forgot all about those sordid personages, all about the office, all about everything, when he saw Miss Breen, slim and black and white, picking her way along the newly set curbing, across from him. He started to run over, then controlled himself, remembering her black dress of mourning; and waited until she looked up and saw him, and lifted his hat soberly. Letty stood still; the wind had beaten a color into her pale cheeks; she was unaffectedly glad to see the young man, and smiled her little elusive smile, humorous and wistful. Jack took her hand.

"I — I heard about it, Miss Breen," he said awkwardly, coloring, in a fine muddle of feelings — pleasure, pity, honest and manly desire. "I'm — I'm awfully sorry."

Something in his deep, boyish voice stirred Letty unexpectedly and profoundly; he looked so clean, so upright, and she knew he loved her. To her own astonishment her throat tightened and the tears rose to her eyes. The reader himself may do well to pause at the spectacle, for not often in the course of this history will he see the heroine of it give way to so sincere and spontaneous an emotion!

"Thank you —" Letty managed to say. And Jack, who was not nearly so self-contained, and felt very tender towards her, had himself to look the other way and get out his handkerchief.

"Mr. Breen said the other day you were here, but I — I didn't know — I thought perhaps you wouldn't want to see me — to see anybody, I mean —"

"I don't want to see 'anybody' — but *you* are different," said Letty; and the next instant was conscious, in sudden fear of herself, that she had said more than she meant. The expression on the young man's face warned her. He stammered something which neither of them heard; both were thinking of that last time they

had seen each other, Jack with a wild hope and elation, Letty with a kind of vexation at her own want of tact or want of *aplomb*, in allowing this situation. "What possessed me — ?" she thought.

"I'd like to — to — this evening — if you — if I can see you — ?" the young fellow finally got out; he might almost as well have been asking her to marry him then and there, so huge a significance did this commonplace request hold for both of them. Letty wanted time to think — and there was no time! Nor would her previous evasive tactics avail her now.

"I — I — why, of course," she said, not looking at him, pulling nervously at her little black veil. And after some further embarrassed exchange of comments about the weather and the new building lots, as the "jerky," a one-mule street-car which operated on temporary tracks between the terminus of the regular line and this suburb, as the "jerky," I say, opportunely came along, Jack put the young lady into this unromantic vehicle, and they parted.

Mr. Dodsley — and it gave Letty an odd relief to discover this — already knew of the reappearance of the girl's father; they had even met, as the older gentleman was walking home with his brother whom he had joined down town one evening. "Oh, Jack, this is my brother — Letty's father, you know," says William, in a matter-of-fact voice; and Jack had accepted the statement with interest, but no surprise. He did not remember to have heard Letty's father spoken of before, but the fact did not strike him as strange. A young man in Mr. Dodsley's frame of mind is not apt to be much interested, except for strongly personal reasons, in his Juliet's papa and mama — not nearly so much as those worthy people fancy. They helped to bring her into the world, and for that feat have his undying gratitude, whenever he happens to think of them at all, which, alas, is seldom. Letty was glad to find that she did not have

to account for her father to her lover. "He can see for himself," she reflected, not without bitterness; "what difference does it make, anyway?"

It made none, for young Dodsley was too kind and too straightforward to be prejudiced by anything about Mr. Breen's appearance or manners, or even to criticise them in private. The family were all assembled together, when he came up that evening about eight o'clock; and Teentsie reluctantly slipped down from Letty's arms and lap where she had been listening to a fairy tale. "There now, *he's* come, and he'll want to see Lets, and we'll all have to go away, and you can't finish, Lets!" complained the child, in a high resentful voice. Letty laughed and reddened, holding out her hand. The young man thought she looked lovely with the youngster in her arms; he was not embarrassed this time. Everybody must know what he was there for — Letty herself knew. Why shouldn't he love her, and why shouldn't all the world know it? thought the honest lad, in a sudden boldness. When they were all gone out of the room at last, he went up to her quite masterfully, and took her hands in his; Letty knew the moment of decision had come.

"Letty," he said in a very grave and manly fashion, "I think you know what I want to say to you. I was going to say it once before. People might think it's not the right time now, but it doesn't seem to me as if that made any difference — you're so *alone* — and I — I can't keep it back any longer, anyhow. I love you. I want to know if you will marry me." He paused, swallowing, and holding her hands tight.

"I — I don't know —" Letty said in a faltering voice. She could not think collectedly; but she did know one thing; she did not love him — not this way, at least. After all, was that so needful? Her father and mother must have loved at first; it had not advantaged them much, she thought. She *liked* Jack — she

could get along with him — she could get along with anybody — she had even got along with her father — Jack was speaking. “I love you,” he said again, huskily. “I never cared for a girl before in my life. I never saw anybody like you — any girl that could — could *touch* you! I *want* you to marry me. I want to — to have you all to myself, for my *own*, Letty. I — I don’t expect you to feel this way about *me* — I don’t suppose a girl ever does. I — I just love you. If you *will* — ? Letty?”

It was very easy. The girl yielded her slender figure to him; his arm was comfortingly strong, though it trembled so; and his first timid kiss was welcome.

The small circle of people who might be supposed to be interested in this event on Letty’s account received the news of her engagement without much surprise, and with no opposition. The girl never knew just what came to pass during Jack’s interview with her father; very likely it did not differ much from most interviews of the sort. Letty did not want to know, for that matter, and never asked, submitting to the moist paternal felicitations afterwards with that resolute deference to which she had trained herself. “He’s a fine young man — a splendid young man or I don’t know how I could bring myself to give you up, Letty,” said her father, who had perhaps seen Jack three times, and knew no more of him than of the man in the moon. And with a solemn gesture: “May God bless you b-both!” ejaculated Mr. Breen, in perfect sincerity and earnestness, and much moved by this sentimental situation and his own important rôle. “I shall be a lonely man, Letty, now your dear mother’s gone — but I’ll get along somehow in the old house. May God bl-bless you both!” An unwholesome desire to laugh took hold of the girl in the midst of her impatience and contempt. She recognized, as she often had before, that her father was not at all a hypocrite; he was in-

capable of the calculation and the knowledge of human nature which successful hypocrisy requires. Nor was he the only person who, from the young woman's point of view, was rather unnecessarily maudlin and foolish. Mrs. William Breen, upon being informed, exploded in tears of delight and embraces — she was *so* glad — Jack was such a lovely fellow — she knew they'd be happy — she *was* so glad! Mrs. David Dodsley, although at first somewhat stiff and reserved when Letty, as in duty bound, went and presented herself before the old lady, thawed into sudden tears about the middle of the call, and became embarrassingly affectionate and confidential thereafter.

"Oh, Jack, she is so sweet!" said the grandmother that evening, pouring out a description of this meeting to the happy young man; "so sweet in that black dress, the poor motherless child! And oh, Jack, such a *lady*! Her mother must have been a lovely woman. What is her father like?"

"Well, he's a good deal on the order of the other Breens, I believe," Jack told her guardedly; with all his simplicity, the young fellow knew that Mr. Henry Breen was by no means the sort of person his grandmother would fancy. But Mrs. Dodsley was too well satisfied with Letty to be disturbed by the information.

For the rest, Letty's Uncle William, according to his wont, said little or nothing; he kissed Letty, shook Jack warmly by the hand, and gave him a cigar. On the other hand, Letty's Uncle Tom, who "blew in from Oklahoma" as he himself put it, during the next day or so, was very loud and hearty in his congratulations and expressions of satisfaction. The world was going slightly better with Thomas, who had been rather seedy and low both in pocket and in spirits upon his last visit to these parts. By some miracle comparable to those which provided the children of Israel on their wanderings, he was in funds again; some Moses of

finance had smitten the rock. Thomas forgot all about his debt to Jack Dodsley; but he gave Letty a hundred dollars towards her wedding-clothes, and would have treated the engaged couple to a box at the theatre to see Nat Goodwin in *The Gilded Fool*, and a royal supper at a restaurant afterwards, if Letty could have been persuaded to go. "Oh, yes, your mother — poor Martha — oh, yes —" murmured Mr. Breen, a little out of countenance and pulling confusedly at his ample mustache — "to be sure, you wouldn't want to go." And he glanced curiously at his brother Harry, who was sitting placidly by, and who, for his part, had signified an entire willingness and pleasure about going! Tom had bought him a suit of clothes; this soldier of fortune was of the most generous disposition in the world.

Letty had told 'Lizbeth the first of all, going out to the kitchen, and finding the old woman chopping hash with severe motions, by the sink. 'Lizbeth heard in silence. At the end she said, "When air you layin' off to git merried?"

"Why, I don't know — I haven't made up my mind. Mr. Dodsley wants it to be in the spring."

There was another silence. Letty, looking into the servant's face, saw, to her alarm and discomfiture, two large tears trickling down on either side of 'Lizbeth's large nose; she whipped them off impatiently.

"Why, why, 'Lizbeth — do you think it's *wrong*?" said the girl, uneasily; "I'm not forgetting mother, you know. I think of her all the time. But I — I —"

"Oh law, no, Letty, 'taint wrong! Folks gits merried right along — there ain't nothin' wrong about it. I was just thinkin' 'bout yer maw. We lived together a good while, her an' me. I dunno as I keer 'bout it, but I reckon I kin put up with yer paw, by myself. Run along an' git merried if you wanten," said 'Lizbeth, setting her jaw and chopping steadily.

So they were married and lived happily ever after. I who write, and you who read, this, would never have yielded to circumstance so supinely as did Letty Breen. We are both of us too high-minded to be ashamed of our relatives, or to dislike those who have a claim on our duty, or to weary of our homes and dingy trials — oh, much too high-minded. And never would we compound with our conscience for a mess of pottage. Young girls are always innocent and unselfish and happy; and where marriage is concerned, there is nothing but true love that counts with them — of course, of course. Close the book and let us make believe that it ends here, as all well-regulated stories should. And so they were married and lived happily ever after.

BOOK THIRD: MR. AND MRS. JACK DODSLEY

CHAPTER I

FIFTEEN or twenty years ago, the Gates fortune, or perhaps it would be better to say the Riggins Estate fortune, was considered a very handsome one in our part of the world; it would be thought comfortable even nowadays. In the eighties when — ahem! — some of us were debutantes, and later, in the nineties when we had all graduated into the young married people's class, Mr. Daniel Webster Gates, who had been attentive to at least a dozen successive crops of girls yet obstinately stayed single all that time, was looked upon as a desirable match, from a worldly standpoint, for almost anybody. He was forty or so, and if he had been a trifle light-behaved as a very young man — a report which, personally, I have always doubted — was, at any rate, entirely steady now. He was sufficiently good looking, he had cosmopolitan manners, he could be able and energetic enough in business affairs when he chose, and his income was ridiculously large for a bachelor. No society anywhere, — the reader is to understand that we have quite done with poor and second-rate people, and are to move, for a while anyhow, in the very best circles, — no society was ever without one or more of these detached, middle-aged gentlemen in light waistcoats, correct, amiably critical, entertaining, and constantly being entertained, equally fond of talking to bright women, looking at pretty girls, and eating good dinners. Mercy

on us, I have seen some of the old boys hanging on to the age of seventy and upwards! Nobody dares to ask how old they are; they remember when the grandmothers of this present generation of buds were themselves just blooming; when the Harvard Association, when the Yale Club, gives its annual banquet, the date of their matriculation is omitted by some unaccountable oversight from the catalogue of names and classes. They are not merely ornamental, for they all work — everybody here works — even Webster Gates worked when he was at home; they have offices and practices, they are worthy members of the community. All the married women young and old, of their acquaintance, regard them with mingled compassion and reproach; don't they know that they have missed the best part of life? They seem to be having a tolerably good time in spite of that sad fact. The strange thing is that when one of them does marry at last, as sometimes happens, he invariably makes some calamitous mistake in his choice, so that all these kindly interested female friends shake their heads over him as much as they did before!

Web Gates, it used to be agreed on all hands, had not the remotest intention of marrying, although he had always shown certain oddly domestic tastes and habits. For some years he lived at the club, with a set of rooms which he furnished in an elaborate style of bachelor elegance across the street. Then after he came back from that trip he made to Egypt and the Orient (I believe), he took a house rather far out, with grounds about it, and established himself there more elegantly still. He had the best servants in town — why not? as the matrons of his circle used to remark with bitterness; he could afford to pay them anything they asked. The place was full of beautiful things; he was said to own one of the finest collections of Turkish and Persian rugs in the State; he introduced Rhodes embroideries

to his admiring public; he began getting together antique mahogany before anybody else ever dreamed of such a thing; he had already exhausted, it was reported, such means of diversion and extravagance as the accumulating of watches, fans, snuff-boxes, miniatures, and old portraits afforded. The last named were all hung in the big room to the right of the first landing as you went up the stairs; he had had a skylight put in and the artificial lights carefully arranged according to the recommendations of some artist friend (of whom he had a great many here and there in New York, Boston — all over the country, in fact), and the walls draped with an approved shade of dull green. There were potted plants and a grand piano, and little Turkish, harem-looking stands, octagonal, delicately inlaid, where you were served with coffee and cigarettes after dinner. The pictures began at the door and went straight around the walls with only one break for a square bay-window which Mr. Gates had hung with some more of his green draperies, and where there was a table prodigiously carved with a piece of tapestry spread on it, and some very remarkable cloisonné vases, which I remember being told he had brought from the Japanese Exhibit at the Chicago Fair in 1893. To be frank, that corner of the room always looked like some kind of chapel and altar to me, and had rather a dusty and stuffy air. Some of the pictures (which have since this time been sold and dispersed) became quite famous in their way; they were all, of course, more interesting and valuable as curiosities than as works of art, many of them being merely funny old daubs. I don't suppose there was such another gallery in the country. There was one, "Hester and Mary, twin daughters of Judge Gideon Sykes of Deerfield, Ct., painted 1769," which was not bad; two young girls with a blue scarf twisted around both pairs of shoulders, holding the ends with heavy tassels in

their hands. It was bought by a millionaire Sykes in Chicago who claimed to be a descendant of Judge Gideon's. An unfinished portrait or sketch of the Revolutionary hero, General Philip Starke, by Gilbert Stuart, is now in the Corcoran Gallery. The "Lady with the Sampler," a really beautiful picture, was presented to the Cincinnati Art Museum the other day; it used to hang conspicuously in the middle of one wall of Mr. Gates's room, and if you failed to notice it, he was likely to call your attention to it before the evening was over. "That little smile of hers is very odd and fetching, don't you think?" he once said to Mrs. Archer Lewis; "she doesn't look as if she ever laughed outright."

"Pooh!" said the lady (she was a Miss Kitty Oldham before her marriage, and a friend of long standing). "Pooh!" says Mrs. Arch., freely; "she didn't have very good teeth, and was afraid of showing 'em, that's all!" Webster only laughed, instead of being offended at this impertinent guess.

"It's queer," he said, "not one of the women I know likes that picture, and the men have always admired it. What is the reason? Are you all jealous?"

"Oh, *jealous*! And besides, I didn't say I didn't like it, I just said — Doctor Vardaman used to make a fuss over it the same way you do; but he could see the technical good points, of course. There must be something besides *that*, though. I suppose it's the eyes and the everlasting smile — and the costume."

Mr. Gates surveyed the picture thoughtfully, twisting the point of his close beard. "Some women, you know," he remarked, rather irrelevantly, "have the kind of waist a man wants to put his arm around — he — he can't help it, he just wants to."

What made Mrs. Kitty, who had a pretty lively tongue of her own, and was not easily daunted by any kind of conversation in no matter what company —

what made that smart little woman of the world color up, and, as soon as was wise, change the subject? "I do think men are horrid," she said, in reporting the incident afterwards to a friend; "you thought about your own waist, of course, right away — and whether *he* thought it was the kind or not, why — why, it wasn't very nice either way! Of course, it was nothing but a picture — only —"

"The dress *is* awfully low-necked," said the friend, without apparent sequence.

"That didn't have anything to do with it — you see dozens worse — and not in pictures either. As if Web Gates didn't — !" the eyes of the two married women met in a prolonged silence. "I suppose they can't help it — they're just *made* that way," Mrs. Lewis added in the tone of final acceptance.

Mr. Gates spent a good deal of his time travelling; there were only four or five months out of the year when he would be at the desk in his office — his private office, where there were more rugs and carved furniture and beautiful electric lamps and another picture or two. Notwithstanding all this effeminate looking luxury, he worked hard and masterfully during his short stays there. He was held in great respect, and, what speaks more for him, in a real affection, by the corps of clerks, stenographers, and bookkeepers tenanted the outside rooms and gilt-barred, plate-glassed cages of the Riggins Estate suite. He was kind to them with a kindness about which there was an unusual humane tact and absence of patronage. The boss was the "best ever!" all the lesser underlings voted; they clubbed together and offered up expensive bunches of American Beauties or chrysanthemums on his desk the morning Mr. Gates came down after he got home from Alaska — from Panama — from Naples. Sometimes a couple of the typewriter girls would burn their midnight oil and cudgel their honest brains in concert to produce a set

of verses welcoming him, or deploring his absence. He was always surprised, pleased, grateful; and used to make little humorous speeches, which were always enthusiastically received. "There's one place where your wit is sure to be appreciated," he had a fashion of saying with mixed irony and amusement, "and that is at your office and by your employees. It's the rule of all offices anyway that the next man under you has to laugh at your fun, or, by jingo, sir, the axe may fall on him! Now Boyle laughs at my jokes, — you know Boyle, don't you? He's been with us for thirty years, — Henderson must laugh at Boyle's jokes; Dodsley laughs at Henderson's jokes; and Heaven knows who laughs at Dodsley's jokes, maybe the office girls! There must be somebody, I suppose."

Mr. Boyle, by the way, was a solid, bald, elderly gentleman who would no more have thought it an obligation to laugh at his employer's jokes than to go to the same church, or smoke the same brand of cigars. He was himself a man of considerable means, not needing in the least his salary of thirty-five hundred a year, but unable to make up his mind to resigning the business in which he had been active all his life. He had managed the estate in the old lady Mrs. Sylvanus Breen's day, knew Gates's father, and called the younger man 'Daniel.' Being a widower, he lived comfortably with one of his unmarried daughters out at Indianola Place, whence he used to make frequent journeys to dine with 'Daniel' at the other end of town, upon the latter's return from Europe or elsewhere, steadfastly refusing to assume the evening clothes, which all the women of the family, almost with tears, urged upon him. "For Dannie Gates? Well, I guess not!" he said impatiently; "I ain't any society man, and he don't give a hang to see me in a dress suit. There won't be but two of us, and we want to talk business — 'tain't any banquet. Lizzie, get me out a

clean shirt and a pair of cuffs, will you?" Sometimes he would recite these struggles at his host's table, to Gates's unstinted delight. The younger man was very fond of this old friend, consulted him always, and deferred to his judgment not seldom. Boyle had a power-of-attorney to act whenever D. W. Gates was away; the old gentleman knew every penny of the Riggins Estate's income and its source; he bought and sold, loaned and borrowed, hired and discharged. It was he who distributed their monthly or quarterly remittances to sundry impecunious members of the Riggins and — let us whisper it! — the Breen families, of which mention has already been made in this chronicle; and it was Mr. Boyle who "... took it upon myself to raise J. F. Dodsley to \$1800, beginning the first of the year. He has been getting \$133.33, but is going to be married. I understand the young lady is a Miss Breen from Z——, probably some relation of old Mr. Breen's. . . ."

Gates found the letter containing the above piece of news upon his arrival in the ancient German city of Cologne, and read it sitting at the hotel table by the window whence he could look out at the minster and the Rhine. In the same mail there was a handsome plain envelope with an enclosure engraved with the information that: "Mr. Henry Breen announced the marriage of his daughter Letitia Parrish to" etc., over which Gates puzzled for a minute or two. "Who on earth is Mr. Henry Breen?" he said to himself; he had thought at first that he could place Jack's bride, but this "Mr. Henry Breen" threw him all out. He was not in the secret of that gentleman's existence, let alone his reappearance. "Must be some one of the everlasting tribe of Breens," he concluded at last; "it's no matter. I'll tell Boyle to get one of his ladies to pick out something for them—" which he did, and therewith dismissed the Dodsleys, husband



and wife, from his mind. Lizzie Boyle went and selected the present — it was a gilt-and-glass French clock — and it was sent out to Mr. and Mrs. John F. Dodsley's new little home three or four weeks later with Mr. Webster Gates's card; and the bill came into the office in the course of time — thirty dollars — and Mr. Boyle paid it. Gates had forgotten the entire transaction, naturally enough, when he reached home almost a year afterwards. He shook hands with young Dodsley without at all noticing the latter's expectant air; and it was only when, in looking over the letters, hotel bills, theatre programmes, and so on, which he had gathered on his travels, he came upon a neat note of thanks dated months back from a lady signing herself in a dashing angular hand *Letitia Breen Dodsley*, that knowledge of his late unpardonable lapse dawned dreadfully upon him.

"Suffering Moses! — and I never said a word to him about it!" he ejaculated in a dismay that was only partly comic; he was a punctilious man and of a very kindly, considerate disposition; "I asked after his grandmother, and paid no more attention to his wife than if she'd been a yellow dog! I believe I'm beginning to dodder." He stopped on his way through the office going out to luncheon, and spoke to the young man. Jack, in his shirt-sleeves, with a green shade over his eyes, was figuring in a ledger; he raised his head with his familiar eager and startled and obedient motion. He pushed back the shade — "Oh, Mr. Gates!" and got hurriedly down from his stool in a little excitement.

"I — I haven't had much time to talk to anybody yet, Jack," said Gates, with a cordiality he did not altogether feel; it was touched with some good-natured shame. "Just as I spoke to you this morning — er — somebody came and interrupted us. Er — how is Mrs. Dodsley — Mrs. Dodsley junior, I mean?" he added with a smile. "You've been doing great things

in my absence." Jack blushed all over with pride and delight. He had been rather hurt and disconcerted by his employer's negligent attitude, but forgave him on the spot. "Oh, we're all right — my wife's very well. We're — we're — living out in the Subdivision now, Mr. Gates — the Estate's subdivision, you know," he explained, observing that the other had not understood.

"Oh, that's *the* Subdivision, is it?" said Gates, amused; and young Dodsley himself laughed. "Sure!" he said manfully. "That's *the* Subdivision; it's the nicest place around here." His color heightened. "We'd like awfully for you to come and see us — see how nice it is, Mr. Gates. You know my grandmother's with us. I made her give up the old house, and give up taking people. She'd like to see you. We couldn't have done it, you know, if it hadn't been for your giving me that raise —"

"Never mind that!" said Gates, hastily; he always felt awkward under thanks. "Look here —" he went on, moved by a still reproachful conscience and a certain good feeling — "come and take lunch with me. We ought to celebrate, I think. This is the first chance I've had since your marriage." The young man went off with him radiantly. "By Jove, if he had a tail, he'd be wagging it!" Gates said to himself, divided between something like contempt and something like affection.

Young Jack, who, nevertheless, was as little of a snob as any man could be, was tremendously set up over this experience. He would have liked for Letty to see him, for his grandmother to see him, for all the world to see him walking off to dine at the club — The Club, mind you! — with Mr. Webster Gates. That gentleman himself would have been astounded, perhaps even a little humiliated, could he have known in what heroic proportions he appeared to his young companion, how large, splendid, and easy his attitude towards life,

how kind, how clever, how generous, he seemed to that honest and faithful view. If Jack thought about his patron's money at all, it was without envy or self-interest, of which the simple young fellow was incapable. He was proud and pleased merely to have the older man's friendship, and to be with him for any reason; and would have walked up to a battery of cannon in full discharge as cheerfully as to Gates's dinner-table, if the latter had desired him. So he was unfeignedly happy going to the club, and drinking a cocktail, and dining off of *potage bonne femme* and *filet de pintade* and *salade au — au* gracious knows what! — "Care for a sweet?" says Mr. Gates, looking from the menu card with a pencil poised; "I don't generally — in the middle of the day, you know, they're a little heavy — unless there's a lady, of course —" And Jack, whose luncheon is commonly a piece of pie and a glass of milk, says no, he doesn't eat the sweets, either. They ate in the grill-room on the men's side —

"But we went over to the ladies' afterwards," said Jack, giving a full, true, and particular account of these adventures to his grandmother and wife that evening; "there were a good many there — somebody was giving a luncheon, I believe — and you ought to have seen the glad hand he got! Of course I knew most of the men, but I felt rather in the way with those ladies; I kept off from him a little bit — so he wouldn't have to be introducing me every minute, you know — I thought that would kind of bore him. But he's awfully nice — he wouldn't let me feel out of it — just wouldn't *let* me. And, oh, I tell you, Grandma, who was there that I *did* know — Amy Duncan. You ought to have seen how surprised she looked when I went up and spoke to her. She said, 'Why, Jack, are *you here*?' I didn't know you were a member of this club.' I told her I wasn't, that Mr. Gates had brought me — and she looked more thunderstruck still!" Jack burst out laughing

at the recollection of Miss Duncan's thunderstruck face.

"I don't see that Amy needed to have been surprised," said the elder Mrs. Dodsley, bristling; "Amy Duncan knows very well who you are, and who I am. Her father was my first cousin. Your grandfather helped to start that club; he was one of the first governors. Amy can't say anything about family or position to *me* —"

"Great Scott, she didn't say anything about family or position to *me*!" cried out Jack; "she knows I haven't the money to belong to a club like that — that's what stumped her."

"Amy never *has* been as polite as she ought to me, nor Ethel, either," the old lady said severely; "and they've never called on Letty but once, though they know very well who she is, too — they know Letty was a Miss Breen, and not at all an *ordinary* person. Of course I've never said anything, unless I was asked outright; but whenever anybody *has* asked, I've always told them yes, that my grandson's wife was one of the old Breen family, a niece of the bishop's. Plenty of people here remember him still; and I must say I'm surprised they haven't been more polite to Letty —"

"Never mind," said Jack's wife, speaking for the first time, and looking at the elder lady with that oddly subdued smile which was habitual with her; "don't think so much about it. I don't make friends quickly, anyhow. And you can't expect people to take in an utter stranger at once — not if I were Lady Clara Vere de Vere. Never mind. Everything comes to those who wait." It was one of Mrs. Von Donhoff's favorite aphorisms, and uttered, by the way, in a very bright imitation of that lady's tripping and lively French, Letty having acquired some knowledge of the rudiments of the language during her association with her aunt, and having further cultivated it at school.

"Well, talking about that," said Jack, "Mr. Gates knows who you are, anyhow, Letty. He asked me particularly, and said he remembered seeing you once when you were a little girl — only he didn't know your father was living yet. He says your grandfather was a great old gentleman; he said nobody could ever forget *him*. He says you're cousins, and he's coming to see you and Grandma."

"We're not cousins at all — we're no earthly relation," said Letty, her face flushing. Her family had never received anything from Gates but kindness; was it for that very obligation she disliked him? "I hope he won't come. I don't want to know him," said Letty, perversely.

Mrs. Jack need not have disturbed her mind about it, however; and, indeed, it is probable she gave very little thought to Mr. Gates, after all, being of a cool, indifferent, and even temperament. As for the gentleman himself, we have all been assured that there is a place paved with amiable intentions such as his. Mr. Gates was a busy man, socially and every other way; he had a thousand calls upon his time for both work and play during those brief intervals when he was in town; and, with the best will in the world, he somehow never did contrive to make that call on the Dodsley ladies, older and younger — not for four or five years, at any rate!

CHAPTER II

THE writer once overheard an elderly lady giving the following counsel to a young gentleman about — it was rumored — to be married, in whom, although unrelated to him, she took the interest natural to all elderly ladies. “Henry,” she said, “you’re not a moneyed man, but don’t go and pick out a poor girl for a wife because you think she’ll be used to living in a small way, and won’t mind economizing. A girl who’s never had anything in her life will expect to begin and *have it all* the minute she’s married, and has some man to provide just for her. She’ll spend right and left, and run you into the poorhouse if you don’t look out. No,” says this old Mrs. Polonius, with a wise and shrewd air, “the best wife for *you* will be some girl that’s always had a *little*, anyhow; then it won’t be such a novelty to her!”

According to this theory, Miss Letty Breen should have been the last person on earth for Mr. John Dodsley, who was anything but a moneyed man, to have married; the young lady had never “had anything,” and it would be difficult to figure a narrower way of life than hers up to the age of twenty-two or three. Jack went directly counter to all practical and worldly rulings; and now it has to be explained that the event justified him. They were married in June, and went to New York, which city neither of them had ever seen (their travels having heretofore been limited to their own state), on their wedding-trip, for which Jack had saved up two hundred dollars; and after four days of honeymooning — “Your money doesn’t go very far in New York,” as the bridegroom remarked ruefully — came

back home, and rented the small house in The Sub-division; and Jack went down to the office next day, blushing and grinning sheepishly under the looks and chaff of his brother-workers, and put on his old office coat and climbed up on his familiar office stool, and Romance flapped her wings benevolently in farewell over his head bowed above the ledger, and took herself off. Letty, with her own head of black braids tied up in a towel, was presiding over the scrub woman at No. 12 Charlotte Street, when, it may be presumed, Romance looked in for a like compliment to the bride; but, alack! young Mrs. Dodsley, having scarcely been aware of the lady goddess's presence, probably never noticed her departure. Almost all the sentiment, all the tender foolishness, all the hundred and one emotions connected with these events, had been the exclusive monopoly of the bridegroom; and as he was eminently happy and satisfied, what else could have been desired? As time went on, Jack became more than ever convinced that his wife was the most beautiful, intellectual, and fascinating of women; he bored all his friends to the final gasp with the tale of her perfections; all the accomplishments and virtues were hers; take her as a housekeeper, a church woman, a lady of fashion, how you chose, there was nothing she couldn't do, and no position in which she would not excel!

We have all read somewhere a wise or cynical Gallic saying about there being always, in the affairs of love, one who kisses and one who is kissed; if that was so in this case, and if poor Jack was doing all the kissing, at least his wife did not let him become conscious of it. Letty was by far too humane, compassionate, liberal, and, after her fashion, too conscientious; she would act out thoroughly the part she had undertaken; and she was actually rather fond of Jack — everybody who knew the young fellow at all was fond of him. More-

over, Letty was genuinely interested in her new life; and, as has been hinted, Mrs. Jack, instead of the thriftless and giddy creature that might have been expected, turned out a pattern helpmeet for a poor man. Nobody ever made a dollar go farther or achieved with it better results; she was as expert, untiring, and ingenious as her mother in the old Muskingum Street days. Indeed, Letty was often reminded of her mother by her own activities; and in these moods thought of the dead woman with a certain melancholy understanding and sympathy.

Young Mrs. Dodsley, in fact, ruled her house and her one servant so well, she was so quick and capable at all the housewifely arts of cooking and cleaning, cutting out her own clothes, executing the most wonderful, intricate needlework, seeing that everything was comfortable and orderly, that Mrs. Dodsley senior, who had naturally been disposed to instruct and patronize at the first, after a few days in the young people's home, not only dropped all idea of suggesting or advising, but went over to Jack's views, horse, foot, and dragoons. Poor old Maria, who in twenty years of striving and worry had never been able to make both ends meet nor save a penny, who was forever in hot water with her servants, her boarders, or her bills, incontinently decided that her grandson had captured a paragon; she even began to entertain some feeling of wonder and admiration for the generation which could develop such a creature; had she herself or any of the girls she remembered made wives so smart, mature, and able at twenty-five? Or such companions for their husbands? Letty was absolutely as near Jack's equal as any woman could come to that gigantic masculine intelligence and character! "My dear, the girls of to-day are way ahead of what *we* used to be — way ahead. I never realized it before!" she said generously.

The two women "got along" together very well; Mrs. David, in her nervous, trembling old age, soft-hearted, irrationally unselfish, harried by groundless worries, would have appealed touchingly to a much harder nature than Letty's; but, for that matter, that resolutely amiable little Mrs. Jack would have "got along" with Xantippe, with Queen Elizabeth, with the worst shrew or harriidan of history, had need be. Perhaps she was more tried by the old lady's insistent affection than by any other feature of their life together; Letty had never in her life been caressed, made much of, wept over, and admired, and it was impossible for her to acquire a taste for these demonstrations. They made her feel foolish, and their genuineness convicted her of insincerity. "Why under the sun can't she be content to live in the house with me, as she would with any other lady?" the younger woman thought with impatience; "we don't need to *love* each other — the main thing is to be nice to each other." But, finding Jack's poor old grandmother one day moping mournfully in a corner over the idea that his wife did not return her feeling, Letty perceived with dismay that if there was to be peace in the household, she must make some further effort.

"I'll g-go away somewhere, Letty; I can start to taking boarders again, if you don't w-want me," sobbed the old lady; "I only c-came because I thought it was so lovely of Jack and you to have me in your home. But I don't want to be a drag on you, or to have you worried taking care of somebody you don't really love!"

"Oh, now, now — don't you feel that way — that's morbid, you don't want to be *morbid*, you know. We're both just as fond of you as we can be — you *know* we are — and Jack's home is yours always!" said Letty, comforting her. Inarticulate, yet none the less distinct, there went through her mind the unhappy

knowledge that she must act this, too! She acted it. That crooked sense of duty that governed her held constantly before her the fact that Jack's grandmother had a right, not alone to the comfort and shelter of his home, but to be made happy there — to feel herself welcome. In the end, the pretence that seemed to her at first so wretched became an easy enough habit.

It was asserted not far back that this story would deal no more with the socially obscure; and though the John Dodsleys kept a tiny establishment, and entertained scarcely at all, and received themselves but few invitations, and were never by any chance mentioned in the "Fashionable Functions," or the "Society Calendar" columns of the Sunday papers, let nobody suppose that they considered themselves as dwelling in any kind of obscurity. Mrs. David and Mrs. John were neither one at all "ordinary"; it was a point upon which the two women, spite of the difference in age and temperament, were entirely congenial. Their standards about money and position and birth and behavior were the same. Letty, if of late she had begun to have some uneasy doubts about the value of the name of Breen as a moral asset, or the glory of that inheritance, still could never forget the stately traditions of her upbringing. When she remembered certain incidents of her grandfather's career, when she thought of her father and her Aunt Helen and that sadly "ordinary" Mrs. William, she smiled with a rather grim humor — still she could not outgrow that early training in family pride; it was part of her. As it happened, she saw and heard very little of these undesirables; sometimes her father wrote her in a strain to which Letty responded by contriving to send him a little money. Once or twice Mrs. William Breen asked them to a "progressive," which Letty punctually returned with a dinner. She sent the children small

presents at Christmas and birthdays, and remorsefully tried to be affectionate and companionable with her aunt; but they saw less and less of each other as time went by. Once Letty's Uncle Tom came and stayed three days with them; strangely enough, as it would seem on the surface, Mr. Breen made a decidedly agreeable impression on the elder Mrs. Dodsley. His large talk and manners of the world pleased the old lady; Thomas, who had made some study of the art of being all things to all men, probably knew how to approach her.

In the meanwhile the Duncan connection, which was pretty large and flourishing, and a number of other personages equally removed from the *ordinary*, in fact (as I promised) belonging to undeniably the best circles, had taken some decent notice of Mr. and Mrs. John Dodsley. Not enough to suit Mrs. David, to be sure "— but they will, Letty, as soon as they get to know you and find out what kind of a person you are," she used to prophesy. She was eaten up by a kind of vicarious social ambition, possessed with the desire to see her young people adorning "their proper place in the world" after all these hard, pinching years. Letty, if she shared at all these aims, was too reserved or too humorously cautious to show it. She only laughed at the older woman's ill-temper and chagrin when, after sundry conventional visits and invitations, Mrs. Dodsley's fashionably eminent relatives left the bride to shift for herself. She thought it was very natural in them. "Why, I'd do the same thing in their place," she remarked philosophically.

"It's their loss, anyway," said her husband, who, with all his good nature, had dutifully felt somewhat piqued when his grandmother pointed out that he ought to be, at the Duncan indifference; "it's their loss. They don't know what they're missing." He regarded his wife with pride. "You can give Amy Duncan

cards and spades when it comes to looks, Letty. I — I wish you could have more money to dress with. There's a white waist — one of these lace waists, I think it is, in Dunn's window; I saw it this morning, and wished I could get it for you. Only it was twenty dollars, and you know —" he concluded regretfully.

"Maybe they'll put it down after a while," said his grandmother, hopefully. "If it got down to ten, Jack —"

"Yes, I could go ten dollars," said Jack, brightening.

"No, no, you mustn't think of getting it," Letty cried out quickly; "I don't *want* it. Don't think about my clothes, Jack; I have everything I want. There're ever so many ways I could spend ten dollars better than on my clothes."

"You always look lovely in anything you put on, anyhow," said Jack, ecstatically.

"Oh, Letty, you *are* so sweet and unselfish!" sighed Mrs. Dodsley, at the same moment. They both kissed her. Letty bore it with her inveterate patience; sometimes it seemed to her as if she were the only grown-up person in the house.

All things come to those who wait; but let us remember, also, that Rome was not built in a day. And notwithstanding Mrs. David Dodsley's vehement aspirations, and Mrs. John Dodsley's personal gifts, it must have been nearly five years before the latter's acquaintance began to widen much. By that time, Mrs. John, who had always been a member of the Trinity (P.E.) congregation, and latterly quite active in sewing society and Ladies' Guild work, had achieved a certain degree of modest prominence, so to speak, in a churchly and charitable way. I have heard that this is a step to be considered in the slow social advance; can that be true? Letty would have thought herself above any such measures. It was not the summit of her ambition to be made Secretary-Treasurer of the Woman's Ex-

change, although — “that will bring you into contact with some of the very nicest people here, Letty,” old Mrs. Dodsley remarked with a good deal of satisfaction. Letty accepted the office and discharged its duties faithfully; the members of the Board said to one another that they ought to call on Mrs. John Dodsley, and asked who she was. There were luncheons. Presently the question of the Loan Exhibition arose, and Mrs. Gwynne Peters and Mrs. Archer Lewis came to see her.

They came in Mrs. Peters’s carriage, an elaborate equipage with a most amazingly lofty colored coachman, and a general effect of shiny black panels, shiny silver-plated chains and buckles, and shiny-sided bay horses. The two visitors surveyed with considerable speculative interest Letty’s parlor, and the little, frugal, dignified house. It was furnished with substantial articles out of the old David Dodsley residence, which had survived the wrack of years and boarders; supplemented by others of the same age and character from Letty’s own girlhood home; the old girandoles and vases condescended to the cheap cabinet mantles; the black-hairclothed ottomans, the claw feet, and glass knobs kindly lent a distinction to the contracted, cut-up “Queen Anne” rooms. One and all they had a gentlemanly air of being unconscious of their own worth and the inadequacy of their setting. “Did you ever see so many beautiful old things?” said Mrs. Peters, low-voiced to her companion, as they waited for Mrs. Dodsley to come down. She looked around in surprise and æsthetic envy. “That old drop-leaf table in the hall! Where do you suppose she’s collected them?”

“Collect — *nothing*, my dear! Those are old family pieces — every one,” retorted Mrs. Lewis, who always knew a little about everything and everybody, and was not hampered with a regard for accuracy. “Ethel Duncan told me about Mrs. Dodsley’s mahogany. She said

she'd never seen anything handsomer anywhere — that's one reason I wanted to come. They haven't much means, you know — his grandmother used to keep the boarding-house, don't you remember? Mother knew her — awfully nice people, but they lost everything, and she had to do something. This Mr. Dodsley has a position with Webster Gates. Ethel said his wife came from somewhere down South; she said she had rather a romantic history — was educated in a convent —"

"Really? Abroad?"

"Yes, oh, yes. France, I suppose. At least, Ethel says she speaks French like a native. Her father was Bishop Breen; he was one of our missionaries to somewhere. Poor as could be, of course, they all are, but perfectly charming, cultivated people always —" and at this point, Letty, coming in, unconsciously put a stop to this flow of picturesque and reliable information.

"You know, Mrs. Dodsley, we thought that we would call it a *Colonial* Exhibition," explained Mrs. Peters, as the call progressed; she was a tall and elegant person, about ten years Letty's senior, in beautiful furs, with a lorgnette and a pronounced New England accent; "we want to confine it to that period — and to pioneer days out here, you know. Everybody is so interested in historical things — and as it's for the Spanish-War sufferers — I mean the cripples and widows, you know," she interpolated hastily, "it — it seems as if this would be particularly appropriate —"

"Yes, the United States is *making* history now," said Letty, readily; "patriotism — I see —" she wanted to laugh, but only her small smile showed; she was remarkably apt at this jargon, and knew it.

"Yes, that's just it," said Mrs. Peters, with a feeling of being completely understood; "we are going to get people to lend whatever heirlooms and interesting things

they have — spinning-wheels and warming-pans and — er — old Bibles, you know — books or documents — and — er — old pewter and china — and bedquilts — we hope to make it really *educational*, Mrs. Dodsley, you see — ?”

“Yes — showing how our ancestors *lived*,” said Letty, appreciatively.

“So interesting, don’t you think? I’m sure it will attract people more on that account. Mrs. Horace Gwynne is going to lend her spinet —” her glance inventoried the room. “I suppose *you* couldn’t be persuaded, Mrs. Dodsley — ? The best of care will be taken, of course. Those old candelabra are so quaint —”

“It will be fifty cents admission,” put in Mrs. Lewis, briskly; she had a practical turn. “And there’re to be two or three tables where we’ll have things for sale — some of the Arts-and-Crafts people are interested in that; they’re going to have baskets and leather and metal-work, and burnt wood and all that sort of stuff,” she added with a profane frankness; “we want you to take charge of the linen embroideries, if you will —”

“I? I’m sure I never could sell anything —”

“Yes, you can, Letty; you can do anything!” cried out Jack’s grandmother, in enthusiastic loyalty; the three younger women exchanged smiling glances.

It developed furthermore that there was to be a tea-table whereat certain of the Daughters of the Revolution, whereof Mrs. Gwynne Peters was one (she was *née* Goodwin of Salem, Massachusetts, and “came down from a Signer”), would preside and pour, taking turns throughout the afternoon. And there were to be “Living Pictures” for the evening’s entertainment. “They used to call them *tableaux*, didn’t they, Mrs. Dodsley?” Mrs. Lewis said, turning to the older lady; and she began to explain: “I saw some beautiful ones in Cincinnati when I was there this last time. I be-

lieve they're having them all over the country. The Cincinnati pictures were given in the Music Hall — perfectly lovely — they had a great big frame on the stage, and then these celebrated paintings imitated exactly, only life-sized, by actual *people*, you know. Of course the thing is to get all the — the smart girls and the débutantes and the men in their set, you know, to pose. You have to have people everybody knows — it's like amateur theatricals, that way — it makes it so much more fun to know all the people. You get an artist to arrange the background and the figures — anybody can do that part of it, of course," said Mrs. Kitty, airily.

"Why, yes, that's what we used to call *tablow vivong*," said the old lady, interested at once; "but we didn't do it in *public*, in *my* day," she added a little haughtily; "we had *private* entertainments for our particular *friends*. We wouldn't have thought of asking people to *pay* to see us."

"Everything is so different now," said Mrs. Peters, almost apologetically; "people want to — to *see* people, you know —" she murmured enigmatically; "they'll really pay anything. And, of course, if *everybody* is in it, why, *nobody* minds!"

And various other details being settled, and young Mrs. Dodsley's coöperation secured, the visitors drove off. Mrs. Peters was of the opinion that — "she really was very attractive — very *nice*. And she must be very sweet to the old lady — her manner towards her was beautiful."

"Yes. And it must be a good deal of a stunt being sweet to your grandmother-in-law!" observed the shrewd Mrs. Arch., thoughtfully.

CHAPTER III

THE Loan Exhibition — pardon me ! — the *Colonial* Exhibition, from which, I believe, there was actually realized a nice sum for the widows, orphans, and veterans of our latest war, was held in the set of rooms occupied at that time by the Woman's Art Club, in a building which has since been converted to other purposes. There was a small auditorium on the second floor with dressing-rooms and a stage, where various dramatic associations occasionally performed ; it was where the Living Pictures were to be presented, and for days beforehand, the ladies who had the enterprise in charge, including Mrs. Jack Dodsley, were to be seen and run into at all hours, dashing up and down stairs from the auditorium to the exposition rooms, frantically consulting in corners, ordering carpenters about or asking questions of them in nervously modulated voices, pouncing on one another with wild eagerness — “Oh, you're *just* the person I wanted to see ! What would you do about — ?” and so on and on infinitely. They got down there at nine o'clock in the morning, and went home tired to death at five P.M. They had trouble with the charwomen, trouble with the leader of the orchestra, trouble with the express companies ; and, for a climax, two days before the exposition was due to be opened, trouble with the steam-heating apparatus, so that they shivered about their final arrangements, wrapped to the eyes, and lamenting bitterly amongst the andirons, counterpanes, and Bibles, by which the public was to be instructed and elevated. “This is the way our ances-

tors lived, sure enough!" one of them said lightly; "we might keep it so for another object-lesson!"

"The wonder is we ever *had* any ancestors. I don't see how they lived to grow up — Br-r-r!" her companion retorted; "you don't seem ever to lose your temper, Mrs. Dodsley — but I do think this is enough to try the patience of Job."

Letty only laughed; she did not mind the cold. She was too much exhilarated by the rush of work, the novelty of intimate companionship, and interests common to a score of other people. There was not one so gay, quick, useful, and untiring; her fellow-workers, to almost all of whom she had been a stranger at the beginning, toward the end of the three weeks of these preparations, knew and rather liked her. The two Duncan girls — girls, indeed! as Mrs. David Dodsley said with a sniff. They were older than Jack, and, by consequence, *years* older than Letty — became quite familiar; perhaps they liked Jack's wife all the better for finding it impossible to patronize her. "She's awfully good style," they remarked with approval as to her manners; and, going farther, marvelled at the successes she achieved with so plain, limited, and inexpensive a wardrobe. Her clothes fitted her; she made for herself with that extraordinarily expert needle shirt-waists and stocks and embroidered linen confections which the best-dressed and most lavish of their friends regarded with envy. There was a distinction about her slenderness and cool pallor; her black hair, they noticed, was coiled or fluffed with a certain air. All this had never attracted anybody's attention before; was it because the young woman had never before improved her opportunities, or had never had any opportunities? An impartial survey would have convinced any one that Mrs. John Dodsley was not at all beautiful, nor unusually bright. She was Mrs. John Dodsley. "She

puts up a tremendously good *front!*" some man said about her, either at this time or a little later.

Mrs. Jack, who was twenty-seven or eight, knew all her own good points perfectly well, and, as that last cryptic utterance may be translated, made the most that there was to be made out of them, would nevertheless have had to be much more liberally endowed in the way of looks to have stood out noticeably among the pretty girls who, at intervals, overran the Exposition quarters, and congregated on the stage and in the attractively mysterious rooms and passages behind it, to rehearse what they called the "Picture Show." Their arrival was also the signal for that of any number of young men, natty lads with their clean-shaven chins, with their fresh and hearty voices. These young people flocked and settled like a tribe of sparrows; they filled the place with the sound of their exuberant spirits, with irresponsible laughter and the jargon of their kind, jokes comprehensible only to themselves, slang of an extraordinary smack and vigor. Their little world pivoted on germans, dinner-dances, and "coming-out" parties; they gleefully wore themselves out in the service of Society. It was next to impossible to get them together, the harassed patronesses and promoters of the entertainment remarked wearily to one another, they all had so much to do and so many places to go. In spite of that, however, the rehearsals and the other preparations incidental to the "Picture Show" did move forward after a fashion; and when the Press Committee got out the programmes and advertisements about ten days before the opening, there was some belated interest and activity amongst these feather-headed youngsters. Everybody was having a costume made, for one thing — always a stimulating business. There was the "Wedding under the Directorate," for instance, a group picture of lovely colors and arrangements in drapery; the "Countess of Quinto; portrait

by Goya," was to be posed by Miss Marjorie Baird, who had dark eyes and delicate, commanding features; "The Gleaners" did not enlist much favor on account of the strong, ungainly figures and peasants' dress, but the background was beautifully managed, and it turned out one of the most successful of them all! "The Night Watch" needed only men, of course, but it took a deal of drilling, and very careful manipulation of the electric and calcium lights under the haggard supervision of that negligible individual the artist, who was giving his services for charity at the solicitation of the ladies. It was Mr. Leopold Burt, a tall, blond, spare, and permanently tired gentleman, and Letty used to watch him sympathetically as he moved about directing his more or less unruly models. Perhaps the picture that gave him the most trouble was that with which this patriotic symposium was to conclude, the little known but very spirited "A glass of Madeira, your Excellency?" after Holman's oil painting of that celebrated Revolutionary incident in the drawing-room of the Phillipse manor on the Hudson, when the lady of the house craftily detained the British general and his staff while the American officers escaped, scrambling off by rear and secret ways, on their horses *ventre à terre*. The picture was exhibited first at the Philadelphia Centennial, I believe. Madame Phillipse, in a hoop and patches, suavely does the honors of her mansion, pointing to a negro slave in the background who grins knowingly behind his silver tray of glasses and decanters; the Britons incline before her; a young girl dressed in pink, with an expression combining mischief and anxiety, curtsies to the visitors from beside her embroidery-frame; another with a rather pale and frightened look glances furtively through an open window behind their backs. The picture tells a story and hits neatly certain popular tastes, which was one reason it had been selected for reproduction. The

colonial room decorated with a charming stiffness of classic white woodwork, red-and-white striped chintz furniture covers, and mathematically-spaced china vases, Mr. Burt contrived to copy to the life; his first difficulty was with the negro servant, a part in which nobody wanted to appear. And as to the rest of them — “They lack *this* — lack it altogether!” he confided to Letty, in whom he seemed to discern a congenial soul, waving his outspread right hand in the air before him, the while with his head tilted slightly back and eyes half-closed he surveyed the scene; he let his hand fall suddenly. “It’s the eighteenth-century *face*,” he said in helpless fatigue; “they haven’t got it — they never will have it. Absolutely irreproducible with our modern features, Mrs. Dodsley. The type’s hopelessly changed.”

“It must be very discouraging,” Letty agreed; “but how about the seventeenth and sixteenth century types? Does it get harder to copy them as you go farther back?”

“No, only in occasional instances. But the eighteenth!” — he repeated his gesture. “Absolutely impossible!” he said with a melancholy conviction. Not long afterwards, Letty, with an inward laugh, heard him asking young Mrs. James Hathaway, who was the Madame Phillipse of the scene, if she would sit to him in the costume — “Your face and head are ideal for the period,” says Mr. Burt, in a tone charged with artistic fastidiousness. She graciously consented; and Jim Hathaway, who was pretty well-to-do, bought the picture for three hundred dollars when it was finished; you may see it hanging in their dining room this minute!

The Exposition opened finally in a rather depressing way, with a scanty attendance on a cold, rainy, sleety, winter morning; people dribbled in, looked around without interest, bought the cheapest thing they could find or nothing at all, and dribbled out again. “They

don't seem to want to be educated," Letty reported to Mrs. Kitty Oldham Lewis when that lady appeared about two o'clock in the afternoon to take her station at the tea-table; she responded with a grimace, drawing down the corners of her mouth, as she glanced about the almost empty rooms. In an hour or so, however, trade began to look up; the dispensers of Arts-and-Crafts novelties enjoyed a brisk sale of raffia work-baskets ornamented with highly-colored zigzags in the Indian style (one-fifty), and pen-wipers of suède leather in dull shades clasped in little triangles of copper and brass (seventy-five); Letty, at her table, disposed of incredible numbers of white embroidered linen belts, and "turnovers" and collars. "Haven't you got any just like that lovely set you have on?" was demanded of her so often it became a jocular by-word with her assistants. The fact was, Letty's delicately wrought handiwork, about which there was a sort of fairylike neatness and finish, gained immeasurably by its unerring adjustment to her face and figure; amongst velvets and brocades she could have worn a muslin with the same air of unstudied suitability — so she *did* wear a muslin on more than one occasion, for that matter, Mrs. Jack's resources being painfully narrow. She had made a great many of the envied collar-and-cuff sets herself. "I believe I could make my living at this, if I had to. I'd just advertise them on myself!" she thought, not without some humorous vanity and elation, as she reached into her glass case for the twentieth time to pick out — "That one with the little trailing sprays and bow-knots like yours, please. It's perfectly *darling*!"

Towards the late afternoon, the Exposition, tea-rooms, sales-tables and all, was in full swing; society (of varying grades) strolled in; Mrs. Gwynne Peters, she who came down from a Signer, was to be seen, erect and gracious, behind the tea-cups, a neighborhood

which all at once became remarkably popular. And when a sparse delegation of men began to be observed, drifting about the place, and momentarily increasing by ones and twos, Letty's associates rejoiced together privately. "Now we'll sell something!" they exclaimed; and sure enough, articles from five dollars up, which had been displayed fruitlessly all day long, began at last to disappear in parcels. Letty herself got rid of a dozen elaborately eyeletted and French-knotted doilies, the price of which had scared away purchasers hitherto; and, with the flush of this victory still upon her, went to wait on a lady and gentleman who had just reached the table, and were examining an embroidered white mull negligé with lace and pink ribbons floating profusely about it, and a bewitching cap to match. It had been on exhibition the whole afternoon.

"What's it for?" said the lady, fixing Letty with a challenging and frankly suspicious eye; she was a thin, pinched, anæmic creature fairly smothered or garotted in a tight dress of black jetted net over lemon-colored satin — a costume which to Mrs. Jack Dodsley's accurate judgment was absolutely the last word in expensive bad taste. "It's to wear, ain't it? What's it for?" repeated the lady, incisively, in a high and nasal voice — the querulous voice of the confirmed invalid. And, indeed, although on a closer inspection it could be guessed that she was no older than Mrs. Dodsley, she might have been taken for forty, with the pathetic lines of physical suffering about her hollowed eyes, her lean throat. A big man, presumably her husband, in a fur-lined overcoat, accompanied her, and was staring hard at everything in sight, with a tolerant and slightly humorous interest.

"It's a — a wrapper — to wear in your room, you know," explained Mrs. Jack, astutely suiting her language to her hearer.

"The land! *That a wrapper?* It's fancy enough

for a party dress. Couldn't you wear it on the street — in summer, of course?"

"Don't look to me as if it was exactly on the right lines for *that*!" said the man, with a faint grin.

"Why, no — it's not meant for anything but indoors. It's supposed to be put on when you get up in the morning — in your room, you know," Letty said again, and spread the elegant garment before her alluringly. The woman abruptly shot out a gaunt little claw of a hand, gloveless and soiled, with two or three diamond rings twinkling and blazing between the grimy knuckles, and seized hold of the price ticket.

"Twenty-five dollars! Well, what do you think of that?" she ejaculated. "Twenty-five dollars for a dress you couldn't wear but in *one room*! But it is just *dandy*, ain't it?" she added, wistfully fingering the ribbons, to Letty's inward uneasiness.

"Well, suppose it is twenty-five? That's all right. Have it if you want it. I can stand it if you can," announced her companion indulgently.

She hesitated. "Is that a head-fixing that goes with it?" she demanded next.

Letty dexterously picked up the cap before the other could touch it, and held it up, turning it about slowly with her own slim, neat hand, and slim wrist. "Yes, you wear this, too. Isn't it pretty? It's all embroidered by hand, and this is thread lace in the frill." Her accent of admiration was genuine; she had a gentlewoman's fondness for this kind of fine raiment. "It is cute," sighed the other. She looked at Letty. "You put it on, so's I can see what it looks like," she commanded.

Letty obligingly set the thing on her head; and one of the young girls of her staff came and straightened it into the proper position with little pats and pulls. "Oh, Mrs. Dodsley, it's *dear* on you!" she said in a burst of seventeen-year-old enthusiasm.

The fur-lined overcoat, eyeing Letty with an uncomfortable intensity, fervently gave it as his opinion that the whole outfit was dead swell. "Better take it, hadn't you?" he said to his wife. "You like it, don't you?"

"I don't know whether it would look that way when I got it home — I ain't sure as I could put it on right," she said, with a look at Letty full of distrust, even of resentment. "*I ain't much of a hand for fussy wrappers. Only thing is —*" and here she addressed the entire table impressively, her high voice even carrying to others near by — "*only thing is, we're going to Floridy or Californy this winter — I *always* go winters, though I can't stand travelling 'round very well, but then we *always* have the stateroom at the end of the Pullman, you know — and of course it might be useful there. We *always* go to the best hotels there is, and a person just has to be dressed up — still I don't know as I'd look like you do in that get-up.*"

Sharp pity smote on Letty's heart. Poor homely thing! Poor homely, sickly, vulgar thing! She took the cap off quickly. "They're becoming to everybody — the outlines soften the face so, you know," she said; "and this pink is sure to look well with hair the color of yours —"

"You're a first-rate saleslady, ain't you?" said the other with a sharp laugh. "Well, I don't know —" she turned the garments over again meditatively. "If you'd let me have 'em for twenty, b'lieve I might —?"

Letty drew back out of countenance, a shade angry. "I only wanted to make her feel a little better about it — she knows she's homely," she thought with indignation. The man had said nothing, stroking his stiff, sandy mustache, his glance moving slowly between the two women. It was borne in on Letty to her own surprise that he understood both of them and all this little scene thoroughly; and he now intervened with authority.

"Oh, here now, you don't want to Jew 'em down at a place like this. Think of our boys that fought, bled and died in Cuba, hey? That five dollars would buy enough booze to keep a regiment of 'em happy for six months!" he said to his wife with a kind of comic severity; and turning to Letty: "We'll take it. Just have it wrapped up, will you, miss — ma'am —?" He dipped up a leviathan roll of bills in a rubber band, from one trousers pocket, and tendered her the money. "I guess we don't need any receipt, Miss — it's Miss Dodson, ain't it?"

"No, *Mrs.* — *Mrs.* Dodsley," said Letty, shaken out of her ordinary presence of mind. She could feel the other woman's jealous eyes on her face.

"Mercy, who *do* you suppose that was?" said *Mrs.* Lewis in an undertone, joining her in a temporary lull of traffic. She looked after the two retreating figures. "Did you ever *see* anything quite so festive as that black and yellow dress? She looks like somebody's cook. And that fur overcoat —! Still, the men of that class always make a better appearance than the women somehow, don't you think so, *Mrs.* Dodsley?"

As the hour for the "Living Pictures" approached, the workers in that enterprise (for which they had boldly charged an extra admission) were relieved to notice that the auditorium was tolerably well filled, and the crowd growing every moment — "People will pay anything to *see* people!" There was a gratifying seriousness behind the scenes amongst those who were going to be seen; some sense of responsibility appeared all at once to have descended upon them, equally worthy and unaccountable. They were abnormally solemn in their medley of wigs, jack-boots, swords, ruffs, rouge, and powder; the girls blacked one another's eyebrows in corners; there was an unappeasable demand for hand-mirrors. Mr. Burt with his usual countenance

of fatigued gloom was, nevertheless, amazingly active among the stage hands, the monstrous malformations of canvas, laths, and props which against all reason and romance one must believe to be scenery, and the incalculable yards of multicolored nettings and gauzes wherewith he proposed to counterfeit a painted atmosphere; his lean black tail coat and coffin-shaped spread of evening shirt flitted to and fro, wearily, indomitably. Electric-light bulbs, caged in wire, hung, swung, gyrated high and low; one had a sensation of cavernous heights overhead where wheels and pulleys turned ominously, and ropes without end performed unguessed services. In these precincts, Letty, venturing with a companion, caught sight of the red-and-white chintz furniture with its accessories of the Revolutionary tableau, thrust in a heap to one side, and heard Mr. Burt's voice raised in sorrowing command: "Take that stuff out of the way. We shan't need it — take it away, I tell you!"

"They can't be going to give that picture. I wonder what the matter is," said the other lady, alertly.

"Oh, he only means he wants it out of the way for the present, don't you think?"

"No, indeed! Something's happened, see if it hasn't!" said the other with a terrier-like air of scenting hidden things; "let's ask him. Oh, Mr. Burt —!"

"Oh, don't do that — he's so busy," Letty interposed; and she appealed to a member of the "Wedding under the Directory" scene; "oh, Miss Parker, aren't they going to have the 'Glass of Madeira' picture?"

"'Glass of Madeira'? — oh, you mean that one that Dolly Patterson and Mrs. Jim Hathaway are in — why, I don't know — I guess so. Only Doll's at home sick, so she won't be in it anyhow," the young lady answered indifferently, and pulled up her long gloves.

They were joined by others. "Why, yes, didn't you hear? Dolly took cold that day they all came down

for the dress rehearsal, and the steam heat wouldn't go, you know —"

"Perfectly silly anyhow, posing around in low-necked dresses with the thermometer next door to zero, in this draughty place," said somebody, impatiently.

"Well, Dolly ought not to have waited till the last minute this way, and then telephoned the doctor wouldn't let her come —"

"Wasn't that Dolly *all over*? She thought she would be well enough by this time, I suppose, and she hates to give up."

It was agreed on all sides that that was Dolly *all over*. Mrs. Hathaway arrived, radiantly pretty in the quilted petticoat, mitts and ruffled fichu she had copied from Mr. Burt's water-color sketch, and looked very blank at receiving the news. "That's the first *I've* heard of it. Are you *sure*?" And with rising vexation: "Well, I certainly think Dorothy Patterson might have had the decency to let me know. It would have saved me the nuisance of coming away down here dressed this way, anyhow —"

"Mrs. Hathaway, I don't believe she thought for a minute the thing would be given up because of *her*. She sent a messenger boy down with her costume, and said she supposed somebody could wear it."

"Oh, wear it! Dolly's about as big around as a broomstick. The girls all say there isn't one of them that can get into Dolly Patterson's waists. Well, this *settles* it! The next time any one sees me mixing into a thing of this kind, they can just get me committed to the insane asylum, that's all!"

Mr. Burt, with the mien of a Hamlet, came and suggested that if the ladies would please move? — the stage must be clear — he was going to set the first picture. He looked at his watch. Yes, it was a great pity about the — ah — the "Glass of Madeira" — Miss Patterson was to have been the young girl in the pink dress.

Couldn't somebody — ? No ? His preoccupied gaze traversed them and landed on Letty — “Mrs. Dodsley is about the size and type, isn't she ?” And once more patient as a martyr: “Excuse me, ladies, I'll *have* to ask you to move.”

The audience, to whom all these tribulations were unknown, and who took, many of them, a prideful or benevolent interest in the performers, — to say nothing of pure curiosity, — welcomed each successive “living picture” with a most generous applause. The curtain went up and down at least three times for every tableau ; baskets and sheaves of flowers were handed over the footlights, something like a bushel of violets, and one overwhelming bouquet of lavender orchids and maidenhair fern (from, it was rumored, Mr. Webster Gates) going to the “Countess of Quinto,” who certainly was a beauty and looked the Spanish great lady to the life. Between times the orchestra played antique or quaintly fashioned tunes supposedly suggestive of the era and nationality of the original works, the rather long waits being thus pleasantly beguiled. As the evening advanced performers whose parts had been discharged appeared picturesquely here and there amongst the seats and boxes, excited young girls, self-conscious young men, bluffing off the admiring comments of their acquaintances, lending a hearty hand to the applause of succeeding tableaux. Everything was going off very well.

Some sagacious person having suggested that it would be well to accompany the “Glass of Madeira” picture with a brief note in the programme explaining it for the benefit of those who had forgotten or never heard of the episode, this had been inserted just below the list of actors ; so that when the curtain rose to reveal this eminently patriotic and appropriate scene, it brought forth a stirring show of appreciation. In fact, the thing was well done ; the calculated charm of the interior had

been caught with astonishing skill; the melodramatic figures were perfect. Mrs. Jimmie graced the centre of the stage ravishingly; the British officers made a fine blaze of scarlet coats, white breeches, and gold braid to the right of the scene, and over against them, the girl in pink with her arms in frilled elbow-sleeves and mitts, held a dainty pinch of skirts in either hand, looking up roguishly from her salutation. She had big black eyes under firmly traced eyebrows, and a rosette of strong pink in her black hair. Motionless, she gave a startling impression of life and spirit, like an arrested flame. "That's never Dolly Patterson!" some surprised young fellow in the audience ejaculated quite loud. "Sh-h!" said the man behind him, irritably. But the next moment a most gratifying, tumultuous applause broke out; the curtain went down and up again — down and up a second time — half a dozen times! The leader of the orchestra had an inspiration, and struck into "The Star Spangled Banner"; there were cheers and bravos. The performers held their positions until their muscles trembled as they stood. Mr. Burt was called out and bowed and bowed again. However the Colonial Exhibition had begun, nobody could deny that it finished in a blaze of glory!

Letty ran off the stage with the rest of them; Jack, in waiting, would have received her literally with open arms, if she would have suffered it. He was quite wild with pride and admiration, ready to believe that all the applause had been for his wife alone, and to look upon everybody else with a superiority and condescension which the good-hearted young man would never in this wide world have assumed on his own account. "Yes, it *was*. It was far and away the best picture of them all. And you were the prettiest woman in the bunch, Letty — yes, you *were*! I heard people talking all around where I was, and they couldn't possibly have known it was my wife. I could hardly keep from telling

'em — I *did* tell one or two —" he burst out, stuttering, delighted. Letty herself was a good deal excited; she had not needed any rouge, the other ladies said, and her eyes were very bright. But that exceedingly well-balanced organ, Mrs. Jack's head, remained unaffected; seldom did the young woman lose it.

"Mercy, Jack, don't get into such a state!" she said low-voiced; "it's only this costume, you know. I've got to go and take it off. You'd better wait outside the —"

"No, no, don't go for a minute, Letty. Mr. Gates is coming around here — they all know him — he wants to see some of them — Miss Baird, that Spanish one, I guess. He said he wanted to meet you, too; he's been wanting to for ever so long, he told me so particularly —"

"Mr. Gates?" Letty said, stiffening internally; "dear me, it was easy enough for him to meet me before this, if he was so anxious about it!" And very likely it was this thought that called a little satirical smile to her lips, as she saw the gentleman coming towards them. Letty looked at him without a sign of recognition, meeting his eyes with the practised blankness of a woman; yet she knew him on the instant. She did not need Jack's flurried murmur in her ear; she would have known Gates in a thousand, even now, after fifteen years. His dark hair was not unbecomingly laced with gray nowadays, she noted; but it was the same easy and cavalierish figure, the same beard of Vandyke cut. Antagonism possessed her. He wanted to meet her, did he? She had been a homely little timid child and he had laughed at her; and then his clerk's wife, an insignificant person, to whom he did not need to be civil, though she were ever so much a lady of the Breen family; now he had discovered that she was presentable and even associated with his friends, this pacha wanted to meet her, forsooth! It was not often that her still soul

was disturbed by so strong an emotion as the dislike with which she regarded the good-looking gentleman who was now bowing before her.

"Mr. Gates!" she said, nodding brightly and pleasantly; her hands were full of her skirts, scarf, fan, and what-not, so there was, of course, no question of shaking his. He made some amiably apologetic speech about feeling very much ashamed, he had meant before this—he hoped, etc., and added, looking at her earnestly, that he believed after all it was not the first time they had met—?

"No?" said Letty in bright surprise. Then a slight concern clouded her face. "I'm afraid I don't—I don't remember—I *ought* to, I know, but—"

"You were a very small person at the time, so it's no wonder. But I think it was when Bishop Breen died—"

"Oh, yes, of course. Oh, yes, I remember now," said Letty in conventional haste. It left Gates (as Mrs. Jack was perfectly well aware) with the impression that if there was anything on earth and during the whole of her career of which she had no recollection whatever, it was himself, and the incident he mentioned!

"We're really cousins, you know, Mrs. Dodsley," he said, ever so faintly piqued; he had a moment of sincere regret that he had not made some effort to know her long ago; his position was rendered a little awkward by that early negligence. Before Letty could follow her second nicely executed look of surprise with some corresponding speech, Mr. Burt came up to them.

"Well, you saved the day, Mrs. Dodsley," the artist said, almost with a smile! He was introduced to Mr. Dodsley, and nodded to Mr. Gates, whom he already knew; and began forthwith to explain the circumstances under which—"Mrs. Dodsley kindly came to the rescue, . . ." etc. "Yes, that's what I was told," Gates said; "of course I knew at once it wasn't Miss Patterson. I never rested till I found out—"

Letty looked at him, smilingly interrogative and self-possessed — and all at once, for no intelligible reason, this experienced gentleman felt a queer and highly unwelcome sensation of defeat and provocation. Burt waited a civil half-second for him to finish, and then turned to the lady: "If you *could* spare me the time, Mrs. Dodsley, I'd like awfully well to paint you in that dress. She has the *real* eighteenth-century face —" he remarked to the others. "Mrs. Dodsley doesn't need to have her portrait painted, though. I've got a picture of her at my house this minute," said Gates. They looked at him startled. "An old oil-painting — you know it, Burt? That one I call 'The Lady with the Sampler'? I bought it out of Doctor Vardaman's collection when the old gentleman died, here ten or twelve years ago." His eyes sought Letty's face, and lingered there frankly. "I don't want to discourage you, but you couldn't get a better likeness. It's astonishing! It struck me the instant I saw Mrs. Dodsley —"

"It must be the dress," said Letty, interested against her will; "I have to take it off now — Cinderella!" She laughed, and swept a little curtesy, and went off laughing.

Gates thought he had never known anything quite so piquant and unusual; the whole episode charmed him. "You must come and take dinner with me — you and your wife, Jack. I want her to see that picture. I'll call; you know, of course, I want to see your grandmother. But keep Thursday evening open, will you —?" He was surprised afterwards to remember his own earnestness.

CHAPTER IV

MR. DANIEL WEBSTER GATES, although he was socially pretty thoroughly seasoned by this time, and in spite of some petting and spoiling such as an agreeable, wealthy bachelor is likely to get from women, not very conceited about himself or his own importance, nevertheless felt a distinct prick of interest and disturbed *amour propre* at the reception he had got from Jack Dodsley's wife. He was not used to having people forget him; there was a kind of sparkling indifference about her that somehow roused him. "She had a sort of air of turning me down," he reflected with amusement; "I wonder if that was natural or put on. You can't tell anything about women —" by which statement, even uttered thus in private, he felt that he demonstrated his own unusual judgment, experience, and observation of the intricate female mind and sex. He knew a good deal about women! He recalled the other Breens he had known, casting back with a thoughtful smile; they were all the same spirited, confident, eccentrically humorous lot, interesting, good-looking, almost without exception utterly worthless — like old Helen, the aunt — like old Edward, the grandfather, whom this girl resembled. "It must have been her manner, though, more than her face," Gates mused; "she was more like my 'Lady' than I ever expected to see anybody in the flesh." And, having arrived at his home, though it was at a late hour of the night, he got up from the lounge where he had been sitting during these meditations, and went into the picture room, grinning a little at his own impatience; and turned on the light, and

stood a good while contemplating the old portrait. The painted face eyed him back with its strange mixture of satire, melancholy, philosophical fun; you could almost read any expression you chose into it, he thought, and noticed that it was about its eyes and brows that the strength of the likeness to young Mrs. Dodsley lay. Otherwise, it might not be really so very close; the living woman was better-looking, if anything. "I'm going to see them side by side," he made up his mind as he retreated; "that will be easy enough to arrange." Perhaps his last waking thought was that he needn't have been, after all, so *empresé*, or, as he actually put it to himself, in such a devil of a hurry to get Jack's promise for Thursday evening. "I doubt if the Dodsley family is overrun with invitations," thought Gates, with his final yawn.

Critic and connoisseur as he was supposed to be, Mr. Gates was mistaken or had deceived himself in his unwonted enthusiasm; Mrs. Jack, for all her air of subdued fires, for all the "tremendously good front" which we have been assured she somehow presented, could never have been as pretty as the original of the "Lady with the Sampler" portrait. Any one of Gates's acquaintances, any one of the women whom he believed himself to have studied so thoroughly, could have told him that Mrs. Dodsley was a thin, young, or youngish female, neither short nor tall, without much figure, unsymmetrically featured, and very dependent on dress and circumstances to keep up that deception about being beautiful which she practised with almost unvarying success on society at large — on all the men, at least, and, indeed, on a great many of the women. To do her justice, she did know how to dress herself, how to walk and talk and act with a composed and, on the whole, rather distinguished style; yet there were dozens of occasions and companies when she received no notice whatever, being quite overlooked and lost in the crowd

— something which surely would never have happened to a real beauty.

Mrs. Dodsley senior was not a little excited, jubilant, and regretful all at once the Sunday afternoon succeeding these events, when Letty and Jack, coming in from a late and wintry walk in the dusk, found that Mr. Daniel Webster Gates had been there, and his card crowning the heap in the little old china basket on Letty's table in the hall — the fine drop-leaf table of Mrs. Gwynne Peters's envy. Both basket and table had served the same purpose sixty or seventy years back in Mrs. Edward Breen's day, when Gates's maternal grandfather used to be referred to by Letty's grandfather as "that soap-boiling fellow, Riggins," and when the latter gentleman, who was a plain person, would not have dreamed of leaving *his* card at Mrs. Edward Breen's door, even if he had owned one, which is doubtful. They laugh best who laugh last; and if the deceased Riggins had any fun left in him after his hard life of toil, enterprise, and thrift, one might fancy him ha-ha-ing uproariously in the shades — amongst the asphodels! — to behold these developments.

"Mr. Gates was *so* sorry to miss you," said Mrs. David, with keen regret herself; "and oh, Letty, he did say such lovely things about Jack. And he said *you* were the success of the evening at the 'Living Pictures'; he said everybody was talking about it, and Mr. Burt wanted to paint you. He said you looked perfectly *brilliant*. Why didn't you tell me? You never said a word about it."

"*I'd* have told you," said Jack; "only she wouldn't let me."

"Oh, that's just talk, you know — people like to say nice things to you that don't really mean anything," Letty said, coloring a little, secretly pleased, notwithstanding her disclaimers. "Mr. Gates must have made up with you for not having come to see you all this

while," she added teasingly. The older lady had been particularly strong in her denunciations of Webster Gates's *remissness*, yes, *rudeness* — much stronger than Mrs. Jack ever permitted herself to be in public, whatever she really felt; but she, too, was beginning to forgive him now.

"And he left an invitation to dinner for you — next Thursday at seven, he said," pursued Mrs. Dodsley, eagerly; and with a convenient deafness as regarded Letty's last remark. "Of course he asked me, too, but I just declined — I knew very well he didn't want an old woman like me; he just asked me for politeness. But oh, Letty, what will you do? Have you anything to wear? I thought of that right away. You'll have to have low-neck, you know —"

"Oh, I don't know that I *have* to have low-neck!" said the other, coolly.

"Why, *Letty!*" cried the grandmother, aghast. "You can't go to his dinner, *Mr. Gates's dinner-party*, and not be suitably dressed —!"

"Fiddle-de-dee! I'll dress as I please for Mr. Gates's dinner-party, and if it suits me, it will have to suit him!" said Letty, briskly and independently. If the truth had been told, during the two minutes or so of this conversation, she had, in her mind's eye, cut down and entirely reconstructed the only garment approaching an evening-dress that hung in her closet; and if it had not been Sunday, her scissors would have been busy at its pink china-silk breadths that instant. "Never mind, I have plenty of time before Thursday evening; I can do it easily," she thought; and resolved to lower the neck in a deep square back and front so that its outlines should repeat, after a modern fashion, those of Miss Patterson's costume the other night, which had been so becoming to her. She recalled Gates's eyes and look with a little laugh; and, indeed, laughed and sung a good deal over her snipping and stitching the next few days.

Yet, after all, nothing of much moment occurred at this dinner, the mere expectation of which caused such an excitement in the Dodsley household. Letty had scarcely anything to report to the eager Mrs. David, sitting up till midnight for them, save the menu and table decorations. The party turned out to be made up of themselves, Mr. Burt, and Mr. and Mrs. Archer Lewis. "You know them pretty well, don't you?" Gates said to Letty as they waited for the last-named to arrive; and presently they came in, Mrs. Kitty alert as usual in a modish white toilette with crystal embroideries, flashing quick glances about Mr. Gates's rich rooms and over his guests, and not at all ill-pleased to find that there were four men to the two women. Under such circumstances, Mrs. Lewis never allowed conversation to languish two seconds — "The men *expect* you to entertain them," she said; and accordingly she had a story about everybody not present, and a laugh for everybody's joke. She was very much the opposite of the shrewd-eyed and rather silent man, her husband, who took Letty out behind Mrs. Archer's trailing and sparkling white draperies and extraordinarily vivacious-looking bare shoulders (she was on the host's arm), leaving Jack and Mr. Burt to support each other in the rear. Mr. Lewis considerably surprised Letty, who had thought he could not possibly remember anything about her or her family, by inquiring after her aunt, Mrs. —? "It was a German-sounding name; I never can recollect it, but I remember *her* very well. She was an extremely handsome woman, a good deal older than she looked, I suppose — she must have been, in fact — is she living still?"

"I know who you mean," Gates put in; "Mrs. Von Donhoff. Oh, yes, she's living still. She was in Montreal, the last I heard." He looked towards Letty. "How old is she, Mrs. Dodsley? Ninety, or near it, I should think. She's the last link between us and that generation."

"Between *you* and that generation?" said the active-witted Mrs. Lewis, interrogatively.

"Yes. Mrs. Dodsley and I are cousins, didn't you know it?" He looked again at Letty with deliberate challenge. Something about her — so he fancied — dared him to this insistence. "Very good, little Mrs. Stiff-neck Breen-Dodsley, *now* what are you going to say!" he thought with a whimsical vindictiveness. And then to himself, "Jove, how attractive she is!"

"You *will* have it so?" said Letty, half defiant, half laughing. Burt, sitting across the table, gave a sudden movement and ejaculation. "It *is* astonishing —" he began to say, but Gates spoke himself at the same moment, without hearing the other.

"Mrs. Dodsley doesn't care a thing in the world about being related to *me*, you see, whereas I'm very anxious to be thought a member of the Breen family —" He waved a hand — "I have the smallest and most contemptible of reasons, of course. They're all such *lookers*!"

"We *must* be related!" said Letty; and Mrs. Lewis began to laugh. Gates laughed, too, with an odd inward commotion. "By Jove!" he kept repeating to himself; "she had an answer! By Jove, she didn't even change color! And with that smile — it's intriguing somehow. She gets hold of you somehow!"

Burt spoke again. "I was just saying," he explained in his fatigued voice, glancing around the table, "that Mrs. Dodsley *does* look very much like that picture you have upstairs. I was up looking at it a while ago; I got here before the rest of you, you know." He looked thoughtfully and measuringly from the master of the house to Letty and back again. "It's a family portrait?"

"No, no — nothing of the sort. Doctor Vardaman picked it up in some New York auction room, and never could find out who the original was. I'm sure it

wasn't painted from any ordinary artist's model, though. It's a *portrait* — maybe of Mrs. Dodsley, in one of her previous incarnations."

"I'd like to see it," said Letty; she appealed to Mrs. Lewis. "Have you ever seen it?"

"Oh, yes. It is a good deal like," the other said in rather a non-committal tone; it not unnaturally occurred to Mrs. Kitty to wonder whether Mrs. Jack Dodsley had the "kind of waist a man wants to put his arm around." Her figure was not nearly so plump and pretty as Mrs. Lewis's own. "... But you can't tell anything about men *that way*!" thought the latter with some scorn; "they're the easiest fooled things that ever were — half the time they're fooling themselves!" she added to herself irrelevantly.

"Oh, you're going to see that picture, Mrs. Dodsley," Lewis said; "don't worry! Web wouldn't let any one get away from here without seeing his gallery. He loves to sit there surrounded by his celebrities."

Letty laughed and said it was natural for a Daniel to feel at home in a den of lions; and Gates looked at her, and said "By Jove!" to himself again. He thought she was very bright.

They went upstairs for the coffee, as was usual, and each of the two ladies took a cigarette, in the most dashing habituated style, with a secret sensation of daring the proprieties; perhaps Mrs. Jack performed this deception more convincingly, however, having a certain talent that way. "Here you are, Mrs. Dodsley," Gates said, and led her in front of the portrait. Mrs. Lewis, who had had about enough of the subject, remained in her lounging-chair by the altar table of *cloisonné* enamels. But Jack, looking over his wife's head at the painting, exclaimed aloud:—

"Why, Letty, it's the one I bought that day — don't you remember? It's funny we didn't notice it looked

like you then — only that was the very first time I'd ever seen her, you know —" he went on earnestly explaining the history of the purchase to Lewis, who nodded and said: "Ah?" — "Is that so?" — "You don't say?" and so forth, at intervals with appreciative intonations; in reality he was hardly listening at all, not feeling much interested, and Jack not being the sort of person to command anybody's attention. Mr. Burt said that the picture ought to be cleaned.

"Oh, that's what you fellows are always wanting to do," Gates retorted; "I'm afraid to let it be touched. It's too old; the paint's almost ready to peel off the canvas."

"It could be done perfectly safely," the artist protested wearily; "then you'd find out who painted it, anyhow. There's a name or some kind of inscription in that top right-hand corner." He craned upwards. "*E—E—l*—no, it's an *f*—then something you can't make out—the next's a capital *B*, I think. It would all show up if you had it cleaned. There's a date, too—some year ending in twenty-six."

"No, seventy-six, isn't it? I always supposed that was seventeen-seventy-six. Doctor Vardaman thought the artist must have been Elihu Booth."

Mr. Burt looked professionally doubtful. "Well—yes—might be, of course—I don't know whether Booth was in this country in seventy-six—there's a biographical note about him in the "American Artists" series—I've got it at the studio; I'll look it up." He drew his eyelids together and examined the picture once more. "The word just in front of the date ends in *t*—*pinxit*, most likely. It would all come out clear if you'd have it cleaned," repeated Mr. Burt.

He drifted away vaguely; and Letty was left with Gates, standing before the "Lady with the Sampler," who appeared to survey them ironically. "I told you it was nothing but the dress," Letty said at last.

"No, it's more than that, a great deal more," said Gates with emphasis. He paused, and then began again in a lower voice; "when you smile, you — you somehow elude one just the way she does. Don't you see how subtle and provoking it is?"

Letty considered the portrait seriously, and then faced him with her candid and straightforward eyes. "Why, yes, I can see it in the picture — but *I'm* not at all elusive, Mr. Gates," she said, with a frankness that teased indefinitely. Gates stood before her, conscious of being helplessly and foolishly attracted, pleased, baffled. He told himself that he knew women who would have blushed and simpered at his recent words, or their tone. "Oh, I don't think I'm elusive," was all Mrs. Jack's comment; it was a masterpiece of simplicity, yet all the while he thought he detected the smile of the portrait, full of a bewildering invitation, on her lips.

"You manage to escape *me*, anyhow," he said, made another pause, and added, this time quite conventionally: "I was disappointed not to find you at home the other day; but Mrs. Dodsley and I had a nice time together. She's an old dear, isn't she?"

Letty agreed heartily. "Wouldn't you have thought her life would have hardened her? But sometimes I feel as if I knew more about the world than she does, even at her age and with all she has gone through."

"Yes. Most of the women of that generation weren't ever allowed to grow up, somehow. Still, just think of the difference between her and Mrs. Vo — er — ahem! — and some other old people one meets!" Mr. Gates finished off somewhat feebly, realizing abruptly that the comparison was sure not to sound very favorable or complimentary to the lady he had been about to name. But Letty looked up at him, direct and humorous.

"You were going to say, Mrs. Von Donhoff," she said; and on a sudden both of them burst into laughter. They exchanged looks of understanding; a common re-

membrance awoke. It was as if the woful old painted harridan of whom they spoke served for a kind of bridge between them, or linked them together to a past in which each had a share. All in a moment, as Gates felt with a pleasure astonishing to himself, they became intimate, unreserved, sympathetic.

"*C'est égal!* — as poor old Aunt Helen would say if she were here," Letty said; and mimicked the old woman's shrug and accent with the nice fidelity of a mirror; "*c'est égal*, she is a very picturesque person. And you've been very kind to her, Mr. Gates."

"Oh, pshaw, don't talk about that," he said quickly, and frowning; and Letty was acute enough not to talk about it. She knew his reticence was sincere, and to be companionable was a kind of science with her.

When they went over to the others, and the evening had worn along as far as the cracked ice, whiskey bottles, and siphons of soda with which it would definitely wind up, Mrs. Lewis was asking: "What does anybody here know about a great, huge, lumbering man with a flaming red mustache, and a fur-lined overcoat, and a perfectly ghastly-looking wife ten years older than he is?"

Nobody seemed to know anything. "Give it up. Where did you ever run across such people?" Archer Lewis asked his wife.

"Why, they were at the 'Colonial.' Everybody was at the 'Colonial' that you ever knew or heard of, and a great many more besides. Mrs. Dodsley, you sold them a lot of things, don't you remember that awful woman? Oh, you all ought to have seen Mrs. Dodsley! All she had to do was simply to *look* at this man — put something on to show them how it was worn, you know, and just *look* at him — he was ready to spend his last cent! Mrs. Dodsley sold him nearly everything she had on the table, and the woman got perfectly *furios*. We were all watching — it was too funny —"

"Do they live here, have you any idea?" said Lewis, interrupting this accurate report.

"I think they must. I saw Mrs. Fur Overcoat out shopping the other day, in a gorgeous velvet dress with a train, and a hat with about forty big white plumes on it, like a Knight Templar, you know, all over one ear, and strings of hair hanging around in her eyes."

"You said a big, red-headed man, didn't you?" said Jack, with sudden interest; "and a fur-lined overcoat — there couldn't be two of 'em, I don't believe. I've seen *him* — don't know about the wife, of course. But if it's the man I'm thinking about, he's Hatfield — J. Hatfield and Company, don't you know?" He glanced around at the men. "The fellow they call Policy Jim — bucket-shop fellow, you know. There was something about him in the paper the other day. He only came here to live a few months ago, I think. He's made a lot of money, I guess, here or somewhere else, wherever he comes from."

"He won't make much more," said the lawyer; "not the same way, anyhow. They're getting after the bucket-shops."

"Hatfield?" repeated Letty.

"'And Company' — but the 'Company's' a negligible quantity, most likely," said Lewis, and eyed over her trim and slight pink-clad figure, and slender neck and arms, and compact black hair, quizzically. "If you put one over on Mr. Policy James Hatfield, I guess you were doing pretty well, Mrs. Dodsley."

It was raining with mixed snow and sleet; Gates offered Mr. Burt a bed, which the artist, who had been ruefully considering his dress trousers and thin patent-leather shoes, accepted with a sigh of relief. The Lewises volunteered to take Mrs. Dodsley home in their carriage — "Only it's too bad, we've only room for one. But if you will come, Mrs. Dodsley —?"

"That's all right; you go on, Letty," said Jack, as she

hesitated; "it doesn't make any difference about me — I can get along all right. So much obliged to you, Mrs. Lewis —"

"Well, it's a pity, Jack —" said the other man, regretfully; "I — I wish we *could* —"

"Now never mind about me. I'll be all right. Letty never worries about me. I'm coming right along —" which he did with the utmost good-nature and cheerfulness, tramping through the freezing slush to the cars, and eventually, as the wires were coated with ice and down in two places, tramping nearly two-thirds of the whole distance, and arriving at the house damp and shivering at half-past one in the morning, an hour after Letty had gone to bed. Jack crept in softly, so as not to rouse her; but, indeed, Letty, was sleeping too sound for that. As her husband had said, she never worried about him.

CHAPTER V

At the present writing it is safe to say that nobody, even of all those people who could tell you so much about it at the time, has the slightest recollection of how, or when, or where, our familiar citizen and friend, James Hatfield, Esquire, accumulated the very comfortable fortune which he has been enjoying the last half-score of years. Nobody knows and nobody cares; in our society, who has the time, or, for that matter, the inclination to run around looking up the antecedents and early career of a decent, well-to-do man whom we all tolerate and even respect? Men in this country are constantly making fortunes and losing them, failing and beginning over again, and going up and going down; it's only three generations from shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves. Let a man get together a few hundred thousands, by whatever methods he will, straight or devious, and in the next ten or fifteen years, everybody will have forgotten, or ceased to ask how he did it — provided he behaves himself and keeps out of politics and the Penitentiary. Policy Jim, indeed! Whenever some faint rumor of his ancient name and fame comes to my ears, I make a business of greeting it with incredulous and scoffing airs. What is this whisper about Hatfield getting his start in a bucket-shop? *I* heard — *and it came pretty straight!* — that he made a strike in the Klondyke, sold out for half a million to a London syndicate (that was in '98), and has practically done nothing in a business way since, setting aside an occasional venture in Wall Street, which has, most likely, given rise to those bucket-shop reports. I have met Mr. Hatfield; he is a plain, unas-

suming man ; one can guess, to be sure, that his youth must have lacked advantages, but the best brought-up person in the community could not be more sensible about his newly acquired wealth and position, or have quieter and less ostentatious manners. He has a handsome house, efficient servants, a whole string of automobiles, a country place somewhere in the Berkshires (Mrs. Hatfield doesn't like the sea), a model farm up in the centre of this state, near the capital whence they get admirable eggs, poultry and dairy products, which they send about to their friends once in a while. Moreover, I am in a position to affirm that all this comfort and style rest, as one may say, on a good solid foundation. The Hatfield bills are paid promptly and without cavil ; the tradespeople are eager for their custom ; the dinner every day is as opulent as those to which I have sometimes sat down, I, who speak to you, at their splendid mahogany, under a regular canopy of electric lights and art-glass. When I can compass it, I go to the dressmaker whom Mrs. Hatfield employs during those off seasons when her wardrobe has not been supplied from New York or Paris ; it is from Madame Tapeneedle (Modiste: Robes et Manteaux) that I gather some of my inside information. As to the rest, it comes from never mind where ! The novelist knows everything.

Ten years or so ago, however, when all these events took place, young Mrs. Dodsley, on the morrow of Mr. Gates's dinner, and at infrequent moments thereafter, — for she had other and more important matters to occupy her, — whenever her mind strayed to Mr. Hatfield, almost laughed aloud. She knew him now, and wondered why she had not known him at once. The square, strong, thick-set boy had grown into a square, strong, thick-set man ; his freckles were all gone, but the sandy hair was the same, the resolute light blue eyes the same. There were some pretty deep lines about these latter nowadays ;

without doubt he had had a hard life. The distressing creature whom he had married could not have made it much easier for him, Letty thought. She was sure now that he remembered her; that was the reason he had looked so steadily, and made so obvious an effort to find out her name. What did he think of her *now*, she speculated for half a minute, then, with another laugh, dismissed Policy Jim and his unspeakable wife, and his absurd bucket-shop-made money from her thoughts altogether.

The truth is, Mrs. Letty was more than busy these days. If it had taken management and ingenuity to make their means cover their expenses heretofore, it took double the management and ingenuity now, when the Dodsleys had emerged from the chrysalis state and become butterflies — to be metaphorical. We have all, perchance, known butterflies who were exceedingly active and brilliant — for a while, at least — on nothing at all, not even the small salary young Dodsley earned; but Jack and his family were honest gentlefolks with a horror of debt and imposture. Nobody knew how they did it; it must have been that amazing little Mrs. Jack. This writer has seen in the pages of certain periodicals intended exclusively for woman's benefit, many columns of instructions headed: "*How to dress well on one hundred dollars a year.*" "*How to market for a family of eight on fifty cents a day*" — nay, how to make plum-puddings out of bran, *consommé* out of egg-shells, and bricks without straw, for what I know! All this and more will the domestic magazine teach you; yet it is to be doubted whether Letty ever made much study of them. Even with all their invaluable hints, the Dodsleys could scarcely have got along without the favors and kindnesses which people were constantly bestowing on them. When the old lady Duncan died, the girls not only gave Mrs. David all their mother's clothes, which were of an appropriate and soberly handsome

style, but sent "Cousin Letty" various blouses, light gowns, hats, and so on, which couldn't be dyed or otherwise converted into mourning, and were many of them "as good as new." Mr. Gates was noticeably thoughtful about theatre and symphony tickets, game in season, and bottles of wine; there were almost always seats in somebody's carriage; everybody all at once remembered the Dodsleys' poverty and their gentility.

In these circumstances and atmosphere nothing was more unlikely than that young Mrs. Dodsley should ever fall in with Mr. Hatfield, or that either one of them should seek the other out, notwithstanding the tender association of their youth. In no great while, however, most of the men of Letty's acquaintance met and knew the ex-policy-shop financier (if that was really what he was) familiarly enough; it is the masculine privilege to know everybody, every Tom, Dick, and Harry, and not be conspicuously harmed by it. Besides, they reported that Hatfield was not a bad sort of fellow. They played pool with him; they took a drink with him once in a way, discovering that he was quite as temperate and sensible about this kind of indulgence as the run of mankind. Presently the fur overcoat disappeared, and Mr. Hatfield's ornate fancy in ties and jewelry abated, so to speak; possibly his talk and manners improved. He could have had no taste at all of his own, and certainly no natural refinement; but he made up for these and other deficiencies by showing himself observant, humorous, companionable, in his man's way. And if he was sometimes rather arrogant, rather loud and coarse-tongued, bullying the servants in public places, and throwing money about too freely — why, I have known men who thought themselves gentlemen, whom everybody called gentlemen, who *were* gentlemen, perhaps (what does a woman know about it?), who did all these things, and were not universally held to have lost caste thereby.

I repeat, however, that though in less than two years or so, it was demonstrated that Mr. Hatfield was entirely presentable in any company of men (he was proposed for the club and elected about this time), it was not probable that their wives would ever meet him, not so long as Mrs. Policy Jim remained Mrs. Policy Jim, at any rate — “All you ladies tell me she’s impossible,” one man said, talking to Mrs. Jack Dodsley; “so I suppose she must be. You know more about it than I do.”

“You’d know, too, if you had ever seen her — or *heard* her,” Letty retorted.

“I don’t think I ever have. He’s never mentioned her more than once or twice in my hearing, and one never sees them together. She’s in bad health, anyhow, and doesn’t go anywhere, somebody told me. It must be pretty hard on a man having an ‘impossible’ wife — and lots of our successful men have, you know. The self-made man makes a better showing than his self-made wife, somehow — with all our talk about the adaptable American woman!”

“I was asked the other day if I knew whether ‘Mrs. Hatfield was — *you know* — ?’” said Letty; “I said, Mercy, yes, Mrs. Hatfield was altogether and irreproachably ‘*you know*’! If she had ever been anything but profoundly respectable, she would actually make a better appearance now! She’d have more *idea*!”

“I suppose there isn’t any hope for her, as it is. Virtue is its own reward. But, on the other hand, look at Jimmie Policy! Nobody knows just what *he’s* been — and his name’s up at the club. I’m for letting him in, myself. Why not? Hang it, one of our members’s a dentist. I’d just as lief be a bucket-shop man as a dentist. Not so much science required, perhaps, but more subtlety.”

After the above epigrammatic remarks, this gentleman — who had dark eyes, and a close, dark beard, and who was fond of light gray suits of clothes and delicately

tinted ties, and was, in short, our and Letty's acquaintance, her cousin, Mr. D. W. Gates—was silent for a minute, watching her move lightly about some chafing-dish preparations for a Sunday evening tea. There were small circlets of linen and lace on the darkly polished table, thick, old-fashioned cut glass that had been her grandmother's, a castor with red Bohemian-glass cruets in frames of Britannia-ware at her right hand, a pair of candles in candlesticks whereof the ancient silver plating had worn down to the copper foundation, illuminating the pretty domestic scene. Their light appeared perpendicularly reflected as it might have been in a well, and the guest could also see a duplicate of his own hand and cuff and the cigar between his fingers, as it rested on the table edge, reversed, fantastically discolored, yet accurate; there was a similar copy of Letty's thin, expert hands, and of her face and her hair. She had come so near him in her preoccupation that he needed hardly to have reached to have put an arm around her waist. He did reach, in fact, but clasped his hand about one of his ankles resting on his knee, with an abrupt movement. He drew a long breath, turned his eyes from her, and deliberately with an extreme care knocked the ash from his cigar; he knocked it into a little tub of fragile and expensive Japanese porcelain which Mr. Gates (her cousin) had given her last Easter with a hobgoblin Japanese dwarf tree, two inches high and a century old, growing in it.

"How did *you* happen to know so much about Mrs. Policy?" he asked.

"I've met her."

"I know. That time when you sold out everything to him —"

"Oh, I didn't really, that was just Mrs. Lewis's story."

"So I guessed. I haven't known Kitty all these years for nothing."

"But I've met Mrs. Hatfield since then," Letty said;

"(can't we time these mushrooms by your watch? They oughtn't to go more than eight minutes). I used to know Mr. Hatfield years ago."

"What?"

"Certainly." She told him the whole story in detail, with some satirical comment, smiling her odd smile at his face of astonishment.

"Well! And so you parted? The course of true love never does run smooth. But do you mean to tell me you knew him — ?"

"Oh, not at first."

"He never forgot *you*, though? He *couldn't*," said the other, with a direct look.

"*Effectivement!* Since he got married!" said Letty, ironically; and eyed him back with a defeating frankness. She stood up to stir the mushrooms, still talking. "You know that great house he's building? It's only about two squares from here; you can see it from our second-floor windows at the back. It's a French château, all over round towers, and gables and chimneys and eaves and gargoyles and tile roofs. I was going by one day, and there was Mr. Hatfield talking to some other man — the architect, it turned out to be. He saw me — I saw him — I don't know how it was exactly — I must have showed somehow that I recognized him — anyhow, he took off his hat and said, 'How do you do, Mrs. Dodsley?' and — and that was all there was of it, you know; the meeting wasn't at all dramatic. We began to talk, and he asked me to go in and see the new house, so I did. We went all over it together. He pointed out all the beauties and conveniences of it to me —"

"Was the architect with you?" interrupted her companion.

"Part of the time — yes. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I — oh, nothing," said the man, lowering his eyes.

Letty glanced at his averted face with a kind of unwilling comprehension. "We didn't mention the old times at all," she said casually; "except that he said he had known me at once. He was a little proud and a little diffident, both—he kept asking my opinion about the house. He explained that he didn't know much about it, and Mrs. Hatfield was too sick to take much interest. The whole thing seemed rather pathetic, somehow. Then at the end he asked if I wouldn't go and see his wife—he said she was so lonesome here, and 'none of the ladies ever came to see her.' Why do you laugh? You *know* it's pitiful. Of course I pretended to be very much pleased and interested, and promised him I'd go right away."

"Humanity or curiosity?"

"Call it both if you want to. But I did go last Thursday. They have a suite at the 'Brittany.' Very sumptuous, in an awful, depressing, fashionable hotel style, you know—a pink satin drawing-room with mirrors and gilt chairs and a Vernis-Martin cabinet. You couldn't imagine anybody *living* in such a place. There was a pair of china vases, imitation Sèvres, the kind they always seem to have in hotels, on the mantel in front of the mirror, and somebody's powder-rag and a very, *very* soiled handkerchief, and a box of cigars. And a *Ladies' Home Journal* and some apple-cores on the little fancy table —"

"All that must have lent a pleasing domestic touch."

Letty laughed with him, but shook her head. "All the same it was sad somehow—all that money—and they don't *know* anything—and that poor woman! She came in directly in a kimono, with her hair done up anyhow and diamond earrings, and a toothpick. You know she has one of those unfortunate complexions that wouldn't look clean if she washed it forever—but I'm afraid Mrs. Hatfield doesn't even try—poor thing! You can see she really is wretchedly ill—these are

done. This is some of your sherry that you sent the other day—would you like a little in the cream sauce?"

"Why, no—but I'll take a glass instead, if I may—?" She brought the old octagonal decanter and an equally old flower-shaped wine-glass and poured for him with a flourish. "'The cypress-slender minister of Wine,'" Gates quoted, and looked at her again with a visible insistence, as if he would have compelled her eyes to meet him; so they did, readily and openly.

"Well, then," he inquired; "how did you get on with the lady?—these are delicious. You're a *chef*.—Was she possible? Was she even *probable*? How did you fare with her?"

Letty shook her head again. "Not at all well. The visit was a flat failure. She seemed to be afraid or suspicious of me—perfectly determined to dislike me, anyhow. I tried my best to find out what she was interested in, and get her to talking about it—but it wasn't much use. She did tell me a good deal about her health and her symptoms and the doctors' bills and their various cures and theories. It seems it's some kind of trouble with the spine—very obscure and hard to manage, I suppose—she must have suffered—! The poor thing was born with it; she couldn't walk, she told me with pride, until she was eleven years old. And '*He*' as she calls him, has spent more than eight thousand dollars trying to have it cured. She was very proud of that, too, and I tried to look properly impressed. She went on to say that '*Me 'n' him* lived neighbors them days, '*n' he* useter pack me erroun' on his back. He was always my little beau,' she said, in the queerest, most defiant way, as if she thought I would deny it. I remembered then, too, that he used to talk to me about a little crippled girl named Ida, and I'm sure it's she. I didn't say anything about that, though."

"*That* was the part of wisdom, without a doubt," Gates commented, grinning; "Mr. Hatfield has prob-

ably tactfully discoursed to her considerably about *you*, which accounts for the reception you got."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Letty, impartially; "she would have been the same with Mrs. Lewis, or Mrs. Peters, or any of us. She looks on us as her natural enemies. It's easy to understand — the poor thing! There's a child — a little girl. Did you know it? I was so surprised."

"Hey? A child? Why, no, — yes, — oh, yes, I do remember now, I believe I've heard him say something about his baby. There's nothing the matter with *it*, I hope?"

"Oh, no, she's a *nice* little girl," said Letty, with unusual earnestness. "The nurse brought her in while I was there. She's about four years old, I think — not a bit pretty, just *nice* and — and chubby, you know, with red hair and freckles, just like her father. She's not spoiled, either, as you'd expect her to be. Her name's Brunhilda, Mrs. Hatfield informed me."

"*Brunhilda!* Good Lord deliver us! Couldn't they call her Mary Ann?"

"Mrs. Hatfield told me she saw the name on a parlor-car and liked it, so they named the baby that. You *will* laugh, and it's not funny — that is, not *all* funny. She was the solemnest little thing; she didn't seem to know what to make of me, though she wasn't afraid — just stared very hard, with her thumb in her mouth. I thought I couldn't even make friends with *her*, till I got up to go, when all at once she came and threw herself on me and tried to climb up my skirt like a kitten, crying desperately, 'I wanta go wiv the *lady* — I wanta *go* wiv the lady!' The nurse had to carry her off bewailing —"

"Good taste she showed, considering her extreme youth!"

"Oh, children always want to go when they see somebody else going, I suppose. I thought her mother was

rather cross with her, pulling her about and screaming at her and the servant because the poor little youngster had fallen down and gotten her dress dirty, and oh, Mr. Gates," said Letty, tragically, "if you could have seen that dress! I believe even a *man* would have known how hideous it was. I did so want to say to the mother: 'Oh, take that off her, and let me tell you what to put on! Let *me* dress her for you!' If I had her, I'd know just *how*. I could dress her *right*, you know," said Letty, with assurance — and Gates thought he detected a note of wistfulness in her voice that stirred him in depths he had not known existed. He dropped his light manner, and put out his hand and gave hers that lay on the table near him a consoling pat. And then Jack came in, hungry and smiling, and happy to see his patron, from the Sunday ball-game, and Mrs. David descended the stairs from the higher latitudes where she had been taking her afternoon nap; and Letty lit the spirit-lamp again.

Mr. Gates had fallen into this habit of Sunday evening tea of late; he came to see them sometimes during the week; and returned the Dodsley hospitalities by frequent dinners such as we have witnessed uninvited. "I knew how it would be as soon as he got to *knowing* you — it's the same with everybody else!" Jack's grandmother pointed out triumphantly when Mr. Gates's notes were brought up, and when the boxes of chrysanthemums and violets, the neat hampers of delicacies, the brace of canvasbacks, the East Shore ham, the Stilton cheese, which he was "... sure such a famous little housekeeper as my cousin would like to try ..." were delivered. Gates's man-servant used to bring them around to the little kitchen-door of No. 12 Charlotte Street, with a lordly and graceful condescension like King Alfred deferring to the swine-herd's wife; and would pocket Jack Dodsley's quarter-dollar

with the utmost propriety and touch his hat and go off with something between a sneer and a grin disarranging the professional immobility of his countenance. The butler was better dressed than the gentleman whose tip he took and whom he despised accordingly; he had more money in the savings-bank than poor Jack ever dreamed of putting by. Even this experienced and judicious menial would allow that young Mrs. Dodsley had some class to her — she wasn't on the Floradora Sextet style, of course, but she did have some class to her. He never gave any opinion at all of her husband; nobody ever did.

Indeed, Webster Gates, as he had been the first, remained almost the only person to appreciate Jack's good qualities. Beginning with that time when, in pure good nature, he took the boy out of drudgery at the City Waterworks and gave him a job in the Riggins Estate office, his kindness to young Dodsley had been unvarying — as unvarying as it was tactful and nicely judged. He continued it in a hundred ways even now when, perhaps, it was less needed. As, for instance, when he inquired one day: "Why don't you have a telephone, Jack? I could — that is, anybody could get word to you or — er — to Mrs. Dodsley so much easier and quicker. How is it you haven't a telephone?"

"Why — I — I don't know — we didn't think we needed one," Jack said, embarrassed and shuffling the pages of his ledger. He had too much pride to explain to his employer that he could not afford that comfort, or luxury. "I'm not going to go hinting around that my salary isn't big enough," the young fellow thought with a becoming spirit.

"Well, you ought to have one," said Gates, with a kind of impatience; "have one put in and charge it to the office — I mean the installation and the monthly expenses — the whole thing —" and happening to catch the eye of old Mr. Boyle (who paid for his own telephone)

fixed on him in open surprise, the head of the office added hurriedly: "I—I want to be able to get you at any time — at *once* — if — if some business question should come up. It's so often important not to lose any time," whereat Mr. Boyle looked more bewildered still. Talk over *business* — the business of the *Riggins Estate* — with Jack Dodsley! The old gentleman's astonishment was ludicrous to behold, and anything but complimentary to his junior clerk. Yet from the standpoint of impartial observers such as you or myself, what more natural than that Mr. Gates should put a telephone in the residence of his trusted employee, to forward his weighty affairs? And why should he not bestow gifts of flowers and stately viands and an occasional trinket and elegant trifles of ornaments for the house on his cousin, Mrs. Letitia Dodsley — his cousin of whom he was so fond?

CHAPTER VI

GATES, as he went home that evening, and it is likely on many other evenings besides, said to himself for the hundredth time with an absurdly disproportionate surprise and interest and delight that he had never known nor could have imagined a woman like the one he had just left. He repeated that from the first moment of his seeing her, her *difference* had impressed him. She was so unobtrusively clever (he thought), so responsive to his every mood, so readily appreciative of another's point of view, yet so original in her own; there was about her a simplicity extraordinarily piquant, unconscious, distinguished. It seemed to him that he was constantly discovering in her new unexplored regions of absorbing interest, shy, delicious retreats of her soul. He recalled her expression as she spoke of the Hatfields' child with a sudden tightening around his heart; she had no children, and he had fancied he saw in her face a regretful tenderness infinitely womanly and sweet. At the moment he had felt — and it returned upon him now — an all but overmastering desire to take her in his arms and tell her that — that — He reached his own door in the middle of these insane dreams, speculations, half-shaped images, and the prosaic motions of fumbling for the key and the lock abruptly and most disconcertingly roused that cool, sardonic, appallingly plain-spoken critic of our actions who lives within us all. "I'm behaving like a boy — a perfect *boy!*" he ejaculated inwardly, and looked into the very old and beautifully carved mirror in his hall at his face and iron-gray hair with a sort of resentful laugh.

Middle-aged gentlemen who are engaged in the process of making fools of themselves, not infrequently comment upon it thus. They are much more lenient to this particular kind of boyishness, as exhibited by themselves, than they would be to any actual boy. Mr. D. W. Gates was on the highroad to fifty; he had probably never thought seriously of marriage, liking his freedom too well, though he must have had the ordinary amorous experiences of the ordinary man. One might have supposed him past all that now, and immune; he was certainly as decent and upright as his neighbor. It was a pretty time of day and a pretty piece of business (so his common-sense sometimes informed him) for him to be falling in love with a married woman twenty years his junior! What was he doing in that *galère*? He knew a score of women prettier than Letty Breen, just as amiable and well mannered, just as bright and sympathetic (notwithstanding the phenomenal gifts in that direction with which his imagination endowed her), single, too, admirably adapted to sit at the head of his table, and be the mother of his children. He could have a fair garden of his own; why was he fiddling with the latch of another man's, and wandering with envy and longing about forbidden boundaries? Why, to be sure! My friends, if we were not forever wanting the thing we cannot have, would the Tenth Commandment have been needed?

Once having reluctantly, defiantly, yet with a strange wild and secret pleasure admitted to himself that he was in love with Letty, Gates first decided with tremendous firmness and energy that he was *not* going to "let himself go," that nothing could ever persuade him to tell her, or even let slip the faintest hint of it, that there was to be no eloping, or raising of scandalous talk, or what he contemptuously denominated "bosh about soul-mating and affinities and all that" — that, in fine, everything should go on exactly as it had been going, and nobody be

any the wiser or the worse off, etc. The resolutions were worthy of his gray hairs and his fifty years; and with that astounding self-deception which the most honorable of men will sometimes practise, he told himself that he was carrying them out, was living painfully under the hard rules he had laid down — told himself so, even in the face of his better knowledge. The touch of her hand sent fire through him; by rights he ought to have avoided, instead of seeking, that dangerous contact. He had no business to visit at the house, no business to load her with presents, no business to write her ambiguous notes, no business to make opportunities for seeing her alone. He did all these things and still fatuously or dishonestly assured his inner judge that he was standing by his bond; or, in moments of sane and clear vision which were daily growing rarer, called himself a boy in mockery and helplessness.

As for Mrs. Letty, this heroine, though she was not without her feminine share of vanity and fondness for intrigue and the shadow of power, it was fully six months before she realized what was happening; she knew her own good points too well to overestimate them, and was not prone to taking anything for granted, or jumping at conclusions. When at last she was obliged to open her eyes to the situation, it was with a sincere astonishment, dashed with the strangest mixture conceivable of amusement, gratification, alarm, curiosity — a thousand feelings. If she was not shocked or indignant, it was because she could not take the thing seriously; some cynical spirit of old Edward surviving in her denounced it as preposterously romantic, beneath belief. Letty herself was not in the least in love with Gates; she had never been in love with any man in her whole life, not excepting her husband. But with all her cool-heartedness and cool-headedness it never occurred to

her to make what profit she could out of this man's infatuation, as it might have to more than one woman in like conditions; that sordid procedure would have filled her with disgust. In the beginning she had accepted Gates's gifts and attentions and made herself agreeable to him in entire good faith; that was her creed; and she continued in the same practices because an appearance of unconsciousness was her only armor. Nobody could have said she either encouraged or discouraged him; and this apparently safe and sure middle policy is not so unfamiliar, even to perfectly honest women, as the saints would have us believe. There were moments when the simplicity and directness of the masculine mind or methods moved Letty to profound laughter; but for that matter all men in love seem to women to be boys, children, so frank are they, so egotistic, so innocently savage. Gates, with his devotion and his idealization and his profuse offerings, was as naively eager, timid, and hopeful as if he had been one-third his age, and Letty his first love. "I'm just a woman like any other woman — and he thinks I'm an angel! But does he *expect to buy an angel?*" she thought when at Christmas there arrived a two-yard string of rose-coral beads bedded down in white satin wherein there also reposed Mr. Gates's card with a word or two — ". . . the beads would look well with his cousin Letty's black hair . . ." And there were other moments when she would wonder, not without scorn, what he thought of his own position — making desperate love to his clerk's wife! Yes, making love, even though he never said a plain word about it! The question could easily have been answered, as Letty with her woman's shrewdness divined; Gates did not allow himself to think about Jack at all. Deliberately he averted his mind from that faithful and devoted servant. "Jack's a better gentleman than he — poor Jack!" Letty sometimes reflected; "*he* wouldn't run



after a married woman !” Indeed, the young man was of a nature not perhaps to resist that temptation, but never to feel it.

In this variety of comedy, the husband, whether he is complacent, or jealous, or merely dull, plays a miserable rôle, and cannot expect much applause ; so, like Gates and the rest of the world for that matter, we need give very little time or notice to Jack Dodsley. He thought it the most natural thing in the world that Mr. Gates should like and admire his wife. Didn't everybody like and admire her ? Had there ever existed such another female creature on this round globe, anyhow ? When Gates called of an evening, Jack sat by smoking his pipe, utterly content, though a great part of the time he could not enter into their talk that ran along with jokes and quotations and an interchange of ideas the honest fellow did not understand. He revered his employer's intellect and character ; and when it came to his wife, her bright face, the feeling of her presence, the sound of her voice, amply satisfied him. Often he went and played solitaire, secluded in the next room, at a corner of the dining-table, the whole evening through, while his grandmother fell asleep on the other side of the fire with her mouth open, and a book across her knee. Jack did not want Mr. Gates to see him yawning, too. And as to all those elegant things which his great man was constantly giving Letty, they seemed to her husband no more elegant than the things he gave everybody else on all the holidays and anniversaries and whenever there was the slightest excuse. Money didn't mean much to *him* ; at the same time, it was seldom you saw a man of wealth so kind and thoughtful about his liberalities. “That was just like him, Letty, taking the trouble to pick out those pink beads because he'd noticed pink went well with your hair, and you wore it a lot,” Jack said warmly, nodding his head over the corals with a discerning and appreciative air ; “that's the

kind of thing he's always doing. I used to tell you how nice he was, didn't I, Grandma? But you never would believe me; you always had the funniest prejudice until you *knew* him."

"Well, Letty thought he wasn't very polite at first, you know, Jack," said Mrs. David, who had clean forgot her own resentment. "I always told her he was a fine man, but she couldn't *know* till she *knew*, could you, Letty?" They kept up the duet of praise while Letty listened, silently, in a kind of humiliated perplexity, touched with contempt for herself, contempt for Gates — whom, however, she liked very well! What ought she to do? she asked inwardly; and reached the same conclusion as Gates himself. Everything could go on as it was without harm, and there was to be no foolishness and no scandal.

It is truly remarkable to us serene, wise, and uplifted mortals, who never feel an evil impulse without heroically subduing it, nor argue our consciences into unwilling silence, nor shuffle one single instant on the doubtful borderland between Right and Wrong — I say it is truly remarkable to lofty spirits such as ours to notice how long a man and woman will juggle and balance on some kind of moral tight rope, all the while confidently expecting not to fall, or at least not to fall before the audience! Yet their strength and dexterity can but last the performance out; one way or another, soon or late, it must end. Gates and Letty both thought they were conducting themselves with the utmost restraint and circumspection; and, in fact, their society witnessed the progress of the intimacy without suspicion, as alert as it was. Gates privately blessed the day when he had good-naturedly, and with no slightest thought of the future, insisted on the cousinship; for, in no great while, everybody who gave the matter any attention at all supposed that Mrs. John Dodsley and Mr. Webster Gates had been brought up together!

The gentleman even extended his affability to the whole Breen connection ; he invited Mr. and Mrs. William to dinner with the Dodsleys, including Bubba and Tee, who, by this time, were grown young people, passing through, or just issued from, the colt stage, and bashfully silent or bashfully talkative, with their pimples and their giggles. The two "squabs," as Gates called them in an aside to Letty, were vastly impressed by the house, the servants, the dinner, the wine, which they had to decline in obedience to their mother's agonized frowns. Even William, a man of sixty years and unblemished reputation, bent before his wife's principles. "Now, Papa Tump, if you touch a drop of that champagne, I'll leave the table!" she proclaimed in a reproachful excitement, and William obeyed with an awkward glance at their host. Gates's butler, though a discreet official, could hardly repress his snigger until he reached the pantry. Letty humanely began to talk about German Opera. The boy and girl sat in silent fury — Mercy, what a wiggling awaited their conscientious parent on the way home! Why couldn't she be like other people? — Why didn't she take a glass and *pretend*, anyhow? — What did she want to *run* Papa that way before people for? — What made her talk so about low-necked dresses? Cousin Letty's dress wasn't too low — *everybody's* dress was cut that way — she didn't know how people did nowadays. She ought to scoop her soup-spoon *from* her and not *towards* her. She oughtn't to have told all that long story about getting a bargain Persian rug for seven dollars and a half — it sounded perfectly *jay*; Mr. Gates's rugs cost *thousands*. And so on and so on, in a jeremiad. They agreed, however, that Mr. Gates was just dandy, and Cousin Letty looked dandy, and it was a pity Cousin Jack was getting so stout, and they had a dandy time, anyhow.

They had not seen the "Lady with the Sampler."
"For the first time in the history of the country, I can't

exhibit it," Gates announced with affected solemnity, when his guests had reached the shaded and splendid retreat where he kept that treasure. And, to be sure, they beheld the empty frame taken down and leaning against the wall, and the canvas itself on a scaffold near by, shrouded up in a cloth — "white samite, mystic, wonderful!" Letty said. There was a tin coffer of artists' materials standing beside it, and a faintly stinging odor of turpentine or some nameless chemical hung in the air.

"I'm sorry — I would have liked you to see it," said Gates, sincerely; "it's a very striking picture, and enough like our Cousin Letty here to have been painted from her. But I'm having it cleaned — yes," he smiled a little in answer to Letty's questioning look, "I gave in to Burt at last. Constant dropping wore away the stone. He's a careful man, I think, and skilful, too. He warned me the cleaning preparation would smell to heaven, but I wouldn't let him take it to his studio. I'm an absolute old woman about that picture."

"It's some risk. Does he think it will be successful?" Letty wanted to know.

"Oh, yes, he says it's coming out wonderfully. Details about the dress and background, you know, that never showed before; there was a sort of mist of dirt over the whole thing, he says. I hope I shall like it as well; the look of age was one of the pleasing things about it."

"Well, I hope it's better looking than the rest you've got, anyway," said honest Mrs. Tump, surveying the walls with open disfavor. "Have you seen that perfectly *wonderful* picture they've got in Klingman's window, Mr. Gates? It's a barn-door, just a big rough door, you know with hinges and a padlock, the most *natural* —! And there's a violin hanging up on a nail, and an old felt hat, and a slate with something written on it and half smeared out, you know, and the pencil



hanging down by a red string — simply *wonderful*, you can't *believe* it's not a real slate. And there's a knot-hole in the wood that's the most lifelike thing. I heard two men betting about it — about the door being a real one, you know. And there's a piece of music stuck up with a thumb-tack alongside the violin — why, I just *looked and looked* — you could have picked it off! Mr. Bokus told me — you know, he's the head of the big candy firm, and he's got the most elegant pictures, he's a splendid judge, and he told me he'd been all over every gallery in Europe, and he never saw anything half so good. 'That's *art!*' he said — just that way, you know; 'I tell you, Mrs. Breen, they may talk their old masters all they want, but *that's art!*'"

It was not long after this entertainment that Mr. Gates, in his quality of a member of the Breen connection, received some unexpected intelligence from a quarter to which neither he nor anybody else in this affectionate family circle had given much attention of late. At first he was taken aback and rather irritated and swore moderately under his breath; then resigned himself philosophically; and ended by going grinning to Letty with the letter which had caused him all these changes of mood. It was four pages of thin, foreign-looking paper, covered with a pointed, slanting, and not too steady handwriting which was diversified, as showed at a glance, with an enormous number of dots, dashes, underscored words, exclamation points and other ornaments. "My dear nephew . . ." it began; "Your constant and noble generosity —"

"Oh, it's full of rot like that," Gates interrupted quickly, as Letty read these words aloud and paused; "you never heard so much fine language in your life. Never mind the sense of it — it really hasn't any, for that matter — just notice the magnificent sound, and — now don't turn over to the end, please, I want to see if you can guess who it is."

Letty shook her head, mystified, but obediently read on. My dear nephew's constant and noble generosity, it seemed, affected the writer to tears when she dwelt on it. Without him, she scarce *dared to think* of the straits to which *she*, a daughter of *their house*, would infallibly have been reduced — and which, alas! even now yawned for her on every side, unless she employed the utmost economy! He was, indeed, as the great English poet (Shakespeare) had beautifully remarked in other circumstances, *less than kin*, but *more than kind!* . . . "Mercy!" ejaculated Letty; but she went on. Obligated as she was (the writer humbly explained) to exercise an extreme of care in her expenditures, she had always hitherto felt that it would be imprudent, nay, *selfish*, to gratify a *mere longing* of the *heart*, by making the long and costly railway journey to see him and the remaining members of the family. "But I am now an old woman; my time here may be short. I do not say that I regret it — *j'en ai tant vu partir par cette route-là!* I think I shall not be sorry to follow them. My spirit turns itself with desire to the scenes of my youth . . ." And winding up with an inexpressibly delicate hint, conveyed in the same elegant phrases that the proposed visit would need a little more funds than she had on hand, she was his deeply grateful and devotedly attached aunt Helen Breen Von Donhoff. A postscript added that he was to address Madame Von Donhoff, 42 Amédée Street, Quebec.

Letty's face, as she finished, was quite white and savage, to Gates's consternation. She handed the letter back to him, and got up and began to walk about the room in a fierce little way he had never seen before. "Of course I might have known who it was," she said chokingly; "it takes one of us — one of 'our house'! I think we are the shabbiest lot ever created. 'Scenes of her childhood!' She was born and brought up in Charlottesville — in New Jersey, and never saw Ohio



until she was nearly grown up. She's lived *on* you for years, and now I suppose she wants to come and live *with* you. Oh, it's intolerable —!" She burst out with hasty gestures, not trying to conceal her anger and mortification; she felt a kind of luxury in thus releasing herself for once.

Gates was infinitely distressed; she seemed to him unreasonable and oversensitive, yet somehow it became her; he liked the sudden flame. All his caution slipped away from him, and he was openly tender in his self-reproach. "Why, Letty," he said, dropping the careful 'Cousin' with which he had always before addressed her; and he went up and took her hand and caressed it. "Why, I hadn't any idea you'd feel this way, or I'd never have showed you the poor old thing's letter. I ought to have understood, I suppose — I don't see how I came to be such a callous numskull. Fools rush in, you know! Only I thought it was — why, my dearest little girl, it is only something to laugh at, can't you look at it that way? You're not going to take Aunt Helen seriously after all this while, surely? You've always laughed before whenever we talked about her —"

"I laughed because that was the best thing to do — because it was the *only* thing to do, don't you *see*?" cried out Letty; "one had to put *some* kind of face on it. You knew all about her — you know about my whole family. I've got over being proud about being a Breen — the best thing is to laugh, if one can. But *this* — it's too much, it's too much!" Her temper had spent itself already, however; or perhaps the hard habit of her whole life had again got the upper hand. She uttered the last words in a tone not nearly so violent, and stood looking at him with a rather dry and bitter amusement. "What are you going to do?" she asked, stepped back a little and withdrew her hand to replace a stray wisp of hair; she had just become aware of something menacingly sentimental in Gates's speech and attitude, and

executed these movements with her astonishingly well-calculated air of unconsciousness — the air that had defeated him a score of times. Why did she now feel with something like panic that it had failed? He relinquished her hand obediently enough, and folded his arms, looking down at her from his greater height with eyes she did not like to meet. "What's to be done?" said Letty, hurriedly, afraid of an instant's silence. She stared hard at Mr. Gates's tie and pin, for a refuge; they were in very good taste, like all the rest of this gentleman's attire.

"Why, send for the old lady, to be sure, and have it over with," he said, and gave a kind of nervous laugh, wholly unlike him. He was as much afraid of a silence as herself, and went on talking almost automatically. "I made up my mind to *that*, and telegraphed her before I came here. And I've seen Mr. Breen —"

"Send for her and get it over with!" cried Letty, again; hysterical mirth seized her. "But you *can't* get it over with — you don't know Aunt Helen, after all. She'll come and sit down the same way she did years ago with us, and nothing but poor Uncle Sylvanus's death could dislodge her. No, no — if she comes, she'll have to come here. I'm her niece — it's only *right*. You've done enough."

"Wait a minute," said Gates, with authority. "She's to go and stay with the William Breens. Well? Why not? They might as well take their turn. She's just as much related to them as she is to you or me. I fixed it up with your uncle — he was very kind and sensible and said at once that she had better come to his house —"

"Yes, you couldn't very well have 'fixed it up' with Mrs. Breen. The trouble is Mrs. Breen knows — or thinks she knows, it's the same thing — perfectly awful things about Aunt Helen, and I don't exactly see them living in the same house together," said Letty, really

concerned, yet tickled irresistibly at the prospect of the Frau Baron's wig and rouge-pots and flasks of cognac in Mrs. Tump's household. She retailed some of her memories to him; Gates thought he had never seen her so arch, sweet, mischievous, utterly charming. "So, you see, Aunt Helen ought really to come here. And as to that about her being related to you, you know very well she's nothing of the sort, Mr. Gates; you put it that way just to save my feelings," Letty said at the end. She shook her head half melancholy, half philosophically resigned. "I tell you I haven't any feelings left about it. I used to think the name of Breen was a great inheritance — but I don't any more. I know better. Why, I remember I used to hate you viciously just because we were under such obligations to you, I suppose — " she stopped abruptly, startled by his expression. "I — I — " stammered Letty, vainly seeking for some commonplace to turn the subject.

"You don't hate me now, though?" Gates said, himself making an effort to speak lightly.

"Oh — I was just a silly young girl, you know — I — " Letty began glibly enough, but could get no farther. He moved closer to her. The dreaded silence fell.

Neither one of them acted absolutely on impulse, without thought; perhaps in some dark corner of the heart or brain, secret and shameful, each had always known that this moment must come. Yet it ought to be said for both that in the beginning of this scene they had no idea but that of keeping their resolutions — Gates to hold himself within bounds, Letty to wear her mask of ignorance and unconcern. And certainly it was a trick of Fate at which the gods themselves might laugh, that brought Helen Von Donhoff, that raddled old scarecrow heroine of nobody knows what indiscreet adventures, to be the cause of their betrayal! All at once they forgot her; they forgot everything. It seemed to Letty that her mind was blank; for Gates, he

thought the very air throbbed between them ; his brain was wheeling around ; all his senses were astir with the wildness of the jungle. He tried to speak and uttered her name thickly. "Oh, I — I can't stand it — I — you — I'm a man, I'm not a stone, and you are so — " he gasped out. His arms were around her, and his lips against hers as he whispered desperately, "I love you — I love you !"

Letty stood still, not yielding, not resisting. In the midst of a physical tumult, she was conscious, with a kind of scorn of herself, of him, that her strongest sensation was one of triumphant vanity.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. or Madame, as she now styled herself, Von Donhoff, had made at least one truthful statement in that beautifully rhetorical letter to her dear nephew — her nephew who was no more kin to her than he was to that other antique Mrs. Helen, the Argive lady of similarly dubious reputation — I say she had told the truth in one instance, anyhow; she *was* an old woman. She must have arrived at eighty-eight or nine by this time; but Letty thought, upon being ushered into the William Breen parlor, when she went around to see her aunt two or three days after the latter reached town, that the old lady looked as if she might be good for another eighty-eight or nine. There was a character of indestructibility about her ruins, such as you may observe in the castles on the Rhine. To be sure, these last twenty years had worked some changes in her; she had lost flesh, had shrunk, in fact, to a knot of indescribably tough-appearing skin and bone. And furthermore, to Letty's vast relief, the old lady wore her own white hair, had abandoned the paint and powder, and coming downstairs at a late hour of the afternoon in heelless list slippers and a loosely-flowing double-gown or wrapper of dark and inexpensive materials, gave the impression of a person to whom even dress had become a matter of slight importance. The business of life was living, nowadays, for old Helen; to see the sun of to-morrow her only real interest. For all her fine flowers of speech, she was no more anxious for her final moment than the rest of us. And, for that matter, that is a singularly unhandsome convention by which we assume that the aged must be forever looking forward with a mild and

holy pleasure to their passage from this world, and the mystic reunions of another life. The truth is, most of us, even at eighty, would rather be associated with a live enemy than a dead friend; and Grandpa doesn't want to be reminded of his mortality, nor, to be honest, of his immortality, any more than you or I!

Madame Helen, notwithstanding her years and her withered-up look, and a very perceptible smell of brandy, which Letty recognized with an inward grimace, was surprisingly alert in mind and body; her black eyes had retreated a good way into her head and were draped about with loose folds and wrinkles, but they were still strong and bright; and she welcomed the young woman with all her old-time vivacity. "*Cette chère petite Letty!*—and how you have grown!" says old Helen, standing off and holding the other by the hands, in the approved attitude of the leading "heavy" in melodrama—"But you have grown—!"

"Naturally!" interjected Letty, with her smile; and her aunt precipitated herself upon her anew with delight. Quite naturally, of course! But she had an *air*—a *tone*—it was ravishing—it was *distingué*—it was of the high world—a *real Breen*—"at last!" she ejaculated in an accent and with a rapid and significant glance around which Letty thought not entirely complimentary to Madame Helen's present environment. Mrs. William was sitting by in a silence unusual for her, and with a very queer grum expression on her round, honest, good-tempered face; and when Teentsie innocently gambolled into the parlor, incontinently hustled the youngster out and away in a sharp and peremptory style quite foreign to her. Contamination—as poor Mrs. Tump's manner only too plainly indicated—dire contamination lurked in the atmosphere of Madame Von Donhoff; Letty, reading one face and the other, thought, "Already!" and shook with secret laughter.

Madame kept on talking in the most fashionable and

mondaine strain imaginable—*mondaine* being, indeed, the word she herself would have used, and she threw in a French phrase now and then, delighting (as was evident to Letty) in the angry suspicions she aroused in the unfortunate Mrs. William who had no skill in that tongue. Age had not staled Helen; her naughtiness might be a little childish, but it showed the ingenuity of a mind yet undecayed. The old woman declared she remembered the Dodsleys and Duncans perfectly. "It has always been such a comfort and gratification to me, Letty, to think that *you*, at least, of your grandfather's descendants, married into your proper station," said Madame, who had never paid the slightest attention to Letty's marriage, one way or the other, until that instant. And she reeled off a string of names, with intimate questions concerning families dignified in the history of the city and state—"Really the nicest people here in *my* day. I suppose it's all changed since then, as *you* don't seem to know any of them," she said to her nephew's wife, pleasantly commiserating.

"*I'm* not at all a *society* woman," said Mrs. William, trembling with rage; "*I* don't believe—"

"Oh, la, la, that sees itself, my dear—*pas la peine!*" says old Helen, with the most exasperating innocent gaiety and amiability. She turned to Letty and resumed confidentially, "Now the Gwynnes—aren't there any of the governor's family left—?"

Letty told her about the Gwynnes, told her about the Lewises, told her about the Burkes, told her about everybody in the universe—as it seemed—humanely trying at intervals to bring Mrs. William into the conversation. It was a vain effort, not alone that the old Von Donhoff maliciously persisted in ignoring her, but because Mrs. William herself sulkily refused to be brought. Some disaster was imminent when the bell rang, and the Breen maid-servant with her sleeves rolled up, wiping her hands on her greasy blue-checked apron,

dodged around the hall stove to the door. They saw her putting aside the red silk curtain shirred across the glass of the upper half, to reconnoitre. "It's a man, Mrs. Breen," she proclaimed, turning back; "I guess you don't want to see no pedlers just now, do you?" And forthwith, "No, we don't want nothing, and we ain't got anything for you!" she announced succinctly through a slender crack. The statement covered the whole ground; it was a masterpiece of brevity and decision.

"You mean the ladies aren't at home?" they heard somebody say. "I'm very sorry. Er — just wait a minute, please — I'd like to leave a card —"

"I think it's Mr. Gates, Aunt Harriet," Letty said.

"Mr. — ? Mercy! Stop, Mabel! Goodness, don't shut it — don't let him go!" shrieked Mrs. Tump, running frantically to the door. "Mr. Gates! Oh, I'm so sorry — she didn't know — Mabel didn't know — *do* come in —!"

"My God, I thought you was a book agent!" said Mabel, in admiring astonishment; "I guess that's one on me!"

The appearance of the one man effected a species of truce in the feminine camps, for the time being. Everybody was polite and vivacious. Mrs. William made lemonade and brought it in with a plate of those small cakes belonging apparently to a geological period antedating history, which, however, Letty remembered from her youthful days in the household. Mr. Gates was most kind and agreeable; his manner to the two older ladies was a feat of inspired civility only to be judged by the fact that, different as they were, each was equally pleased with him. Letty and he met without change of countenance, at which both felt a certain wonder, and perhaps a sense that there was something hateful in the completeness of their worldly training. Yet call it hypocritical, call it shameless, call it what you choose,

what should they have done but keep their self-possession? They had not seen each other since the moment when he had somehow got himself away from her, from the house. He now remarked quite openly that Jack had happened to say she would be calling on her aunt to-day. He had thought it would be a good opportunity to see them all together, and arrange for a dinner — should we say next Wednesday night? “And I think I’d better not lead your young people into dissipation this time, Mrs. Breen,” he said frankly and smiling; “they’d be bored to death with so many of their elders, anyhow — your daughter isn’t out yet, is she?” The lady dutifully acquiesced to everything; she was not entirely at her ease with him.

“The picture’s finished,” Mr. Gates said, speaking directly to Letty almost for the first time, as he rose; he hesitated, then said, “There’s a very strange thing happened — a — well, it’s more than a coincidence — it’s a very strange, uncanny thing about that picture. No, I’m not going to tell you about it — I’m making a mystery of it purposely,” he added, looking around on their three inquiring faces with amusement; “it’s because I want to make sure of your coming Wednesday.” And so, refusing to answer any questions, he went off laughing.

He need have had no fears; nothing could have kept either Mrs. William Breen or Madame Helen Von Donhoff away. Letty heard from both ladies; they appeared to have patched up a kind of armed peace for public occasions, but relieved themselves by pouring into her facile ear all their outrages and annoyances. “I’m only doing it on Tump’s — your uncle’s account,” said his wife, with tears of anger; “I *don’t* see how he can ask it of me — with my children in the house — I just told him so right out, and, Letty, I never saw him look so. He just said what did I know against his aunt? And you know of course I don’t know — I just have a

feeling, *anybody would*. Why, William *knows* himself — he *knows* she isn't — and he just seems to think because she's his aunt we've got to take her in. And you know, Letty," said the poor mother, coming in a burst of jealousy to her main grievance, "the children think she's *splendid* — I just can't keep them away from her — they think she's so full of fun and interesting — and she tells them *all kinds* of stories, and they're so innocent. I guess Bubba knows — he's eighteen, and they *will* learn things, you know. But it don't s-seem to ma-make the least *bit* of difference to him!" sobbed Mrs. Tump, stormily.

On the other hand, Madame Von Donhoff, when she had the opportunity, was very dry, satirical, and pointed about her hostess, towards whom evidently she felt no slightest sense of obligation. "That Madame Tompe, she knows infallibly to say the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time. It's a quality!" the old lady remarked with ferocious sarcasm. "And she has such a circle of acquaintances! At least eight ladies of the neighborhood, I should think. It is difficult to conceive how she gets through her social duties with so many friends and intimates. But no! I am mistaken. There are now only seven; she has quarrelled with the lady at the corner, who is rich to suffocation, so rich that she uses coffee at forty cents a pound, and has two sets of curtains for every window. For me, I tell Madame Tompe that she does well to condemn such ostentation. And Madame's house! One sees what it was that fascinated our William at the *Pension Hudnut* that Madame William's mama kept; it was the table. Believe it if you can, we have mashed potatoes and gravy every day for dinner — *every day* — I assure you it is not every household that reaches such heights. In the morning what is left of the mashed potatoes is made into little pads and fried in what is left of the gravy. But think of the simplicity! It touches gen-



ius. We also have I do not know what made out of rice and milk and raisins boiled together for a dessert. She calls it a pudding, but that —" said old Helen, shaking her head profoundly — "*that* is an error. It is magnificent, but it is not pudding!"

Letty listened sympathetically to both sides. She comforted Mrs. William as best she could, with some shame at finding herself unwarrantably amused by the latter's perfectly justifiable anxiety and resentment. "What is the matter with me?" she sometimes thought in a kind of terror; "am I cynical? Am I corrupt? I try to make allowances for everybody; is that only weakness? I want to be humane, and I suppose I am really only shirking responsibilities and difficulties. I ought to be sorry for Aunt Harriet, and here I am laughing at her. I ought to be virtuously indignant against Aunt Helen; and I only think her a poor old woman, grotesque and shabby and harmless now, whatever she may have been. I ought to despise Webster Gates and think his love-making an insult and denounce him for a scoundrel and a libertine; but I don't despise him at all, I like him. I even like him for being foolish about me; and instead of denouncing him, I am mortally anxious for nobody ever to know anything about it! All the while I keep this home as nicely as I can; I make Jack and his grandmother as happy and comfortable as I can. Sometimes I am bored with them, sometimes I am wearied to death with my everlasting pretences, but I never let them see it. I do all the things that only dutiful and self-sacrificing women are supposed to do, yet I cannot honestly think myself dutiful or self-sacrificing. What is the matter with me? Am I a good woman? Am I a bad woman? I don't know!" She looked at herself in the glass, and smiled and went on fastening up the waist of her one evening dress for Gates's dinner party; and Jack called up the stairs that there was a carriage stopping at their door.

"It's all right. Mr. Gates said he was going to send one for us." said Letty, calmly.

"That was kind of him, wasn't it? He's always doing nice things!"

Madame Von Donhoff this evening presented a truly stupendous picture of crumbling magnificence, something akin, as one might fancy, to that of the monuments in Westminster Abbey, in a seasoned gray satin dress with a great quantity of blond lace, an amazing cap with ruffles and rosettes of more blond and bunches of artificial pink roses and silver leaves, and a large gray feather fan rather ragged, faded, and soiled, which she wielded with the graces cultivated in her youth. Helen's wardrobe was not what it had been in Letty's remembrance; very likely it reflected the dinginess of her last fifteen or twenty years. The surprising thing was that the old woman, after a lifetime of Heaven knows what ignoble experiences and vicissitudes, could still contrive on occasion to play the great lady so well! She was twice as entertaining, agreeable, and mannerly as the unlucky Mrs. William, for all the latter's superior worth and honesty. "She couldn't keep it up, of course. But *I* could manage with her very well — if she didn't get to taking more than was good for her," thought her niece Letty, observing somewhat restively Madame's expedition in emptying her champagne glass. But old Helen's head was pretty hard; she left the table steadily and showed as keen an interest as any of them in Gates's enigma about the picture when they were assembled before it. It was back in place, but still veiled in a mysterious and dramatic fashion, and Gates's voice was actually a little grave as he prepared to exhibit it.

"I — I want to say —" he began, turning to his guests as they stood in an expectant circle; "that I had nobody but the family here to-night, because I know none of you — none of *us* —" he glanced at Letty — "would care to have any outsiders. You all know how

I came to own this portrait (for it is a portrait), you know it was just luck — one of those unbelievable things that nevertheless do sometimes happen. The cleaning brought out something that's been covered up for years — since nobody knows when. Burt, the fellow that cleaned it, is the only person that knows about it except me, and of course he doesn't attach any importance to it, not knowing the — the other facts. Still, I intimated to him that I didn't want it talked about, and he's discreet, he won't say anything. And he'll cover it all up again, if you — if we want it done. That's one of the things I wanted to consult the family about to-night —”

“What is the subject?” inquired Madame Von Donhoff, alertly. “Did you say a portrait, Daniel? But of who, then? Susannah? The lady that had the flirtation with the elders, I mean? Aphrodite? Titian's wife? No? But then, what is it you want covered up?”

“At least, I thought you all ought to know about it,” Gates finished without heeding her; and he stripped down the curtain with a quick movement, and stepped aside.

William Breen and his wife and Madame Helen, none of whom had ever seen “The Lady with the Sampler,” drew together, staring; Gates himself went and leaned against his carved table, twisting the point of his beard with a little habitual gesture, and looked at Letty; Jack, after an instant, was the first to speak. “The colors come out fine since it's been cleaned,” he declared, seeking to show a complimentary interest; “it looks more like you than ever, Letty.”

“She has a ring on her left hand that never used to show,” said Letty. Her eyes met Gates's.

“But that isn't the surprise, is it?” she said, looking away, with a slowly rising flush. “I don't see anything different —”

"It's very charming, Daniel," said old Helen, critically cautious; "very charming, and, as you say, might have been taken for our little Letty. But, *voiyons*, what is the mystery —?"

"Oh," said William Breen, suddenly, in an odd voice; he went up close and studied some lettering in the corner of the canvas, which, indeed, he had been eying hard for a moment; and turned back slowly. "I thought at first it said '*Miss*,' but it's M-r-double s — short for '*Mistress*' — same as '*Mrs.*,' you know," he explained deliberately, and read: —

Mrfs. Elinor Breen

Ætat, 26 yrs.

"WHAT!" shrieked out old Helen. She ran and stood in front of the thing, trembling, her old eyes searching. She broke into French ejaculations, hysterically. "*Ah, oui — il n'y a pas à s'y douter — c'est elle — quelle chance! — Mon Dieu, c'est impayable — on ne saurait le croire —*"

Gates brought her a glass of cordial in some anxiety, but she actually refused it, waving him away in her excitement. The others, who knew the tale, watched her with something not far from awe and a certain fear; fourscore years were gone over, but this was the daughter yet living of the smiling, faithless, loose-lived enchantress whose face glowed on them from the wall yonder. The scene brought her and her misdeeds as near as yesterday.

"I'm kind of glad the children aren't here," said William; "they don't know anything about her." He passed a hand up the back of his head through his thin gray hair, and rubbed the bald spot on his crown, gazing at the floor meditatively. "I guess it would be just as well if that inscription was painted out."

Jack withdrew as far as he could without getting bodily out of the room (which he thought would look

too pointed) and roamed about in the background, smoking, and examining the other pictures minutely, and turning over books with an elaborate unconsciousness. He had a hazy idea that the late Mistress Elinor Breen's career had been more or less disreputable, and considered it the part of a gentleman not to see or hear anything. Letty surveyed the portrait again, obscurely troubled.

"I suppose you're *sure*, Aunt Helen?" she asked, constrainedly.

"Eh? *Sure*? But absolutely! True, I can't remember her — but figure to yourselves —" said the old lady, gesticulating dramatically — "figure to yourselves that I have heard Edward, I have heard your father, William, describe this very picture! *He* remembered her well — oh, but *well*! It must be the same picture that he thought had been destroyed — I never heard him speak of any other —"

"Is that so?" said William, interested, but a little distrustful; he himself had never known his father to mention her; it was from his mother that William had heard the dread secret. "Well, why *wasn't* it destroyed? And where was it put, do you suppose?"

"Some — how do you call it — some *grenier*, no doubt," said old Helen.

"Somebody's attic, very likely," Gates said, assenting to her inquiring look; "the person who was charged with destroying it probably hadn't the heart to, at the last. It's so — so charming, you see. I'm sure I couldn't have done it! Whoever it was, probably thought it would be enough to stick it away in some corner, where it would be out of sight and out of mind, therefore. I have thought, too," he added, hesitating and looking at William's grave spectacles with some embarrassment, "that perhaps there were people who didn't believe the — er — the stories, or — or sympa-

thized with —" he made a gesture towards the portrait, that smiled back at him ironically.

Mrs. Von Donhoff shrugged. "*Et quand même* — ! We are all mortal — all of us others — and liable to err !" she observed broad-mindedly, at which expression of opinion Mrs. Tump Breen's countenance took on a dreadfully frigid look of righteousness.

"Some people —" she began, but William intervened quickly. "It's kind of queer, though, isn't it, that everybody forgot it so completely? Everybody in the family, and outsiders, too?" he said, launching the question at the entire circle.

"Well, a hundred years —" Letty suggested.

"And one does not exactly choose to talk about her, remember," said Mrs. Von Donhoff, waving her fan. "*Dame !* There have been more agreeable topics !"

"I've no doubt it went to another garret, or a second-hand shop in some household upheaval, the kind that are always happening — when people move, or clean house, you know," Gates said. He eyed the picture in thoughtful admiration. "Just think —" he said, turning involuntarily to Letty for sympathetic understanding — "what she must have seen ! What she must have been through ! So many, many, strange hands before Doctor Vardaman's and mine — and to return to her own people again, after a century of wanderings in a country like this !"

"Her own people, truly — that's well said, Daniel !" ejaculated Madame Helen, in fresh wonder ; she pointed with her fan, excitedly. "*Tiens*, look at Letty ! Edward told me once there was a resemblance — *mais on ne demanderait pas mieux* — !"

"I can't see it — I don't see it at all — she's not a bit like !" cried Mrs. William, in sheer goodness of heart, thinking from Letty's silence that she was distressed by this unhappy fact. Madame Helen looked

from the painted to the living woman, and shrugged an expressive shoulder.

"As Madame Tompe chooses!" she remarked with ironical deference; "but I would certainly have the name painted out."

"Very good," Gates said; "I'll have it done. I thought, myself, it was too conspicuous, and would be likely to start people asking questions, and — and — it would hardly do to have anything of that sort even now. I'll leave you the portrait in my will, Cousin Letty," he added, trying to speak lightly. But somehow it was not possible for any of the company to take this singular incident otherwise than in a serious mood.

As his guests filed downstairs when their evening was over, Gates dropped behind, laying a detaining hand, unseen, on Letty's arm; she came last, and stopped still responsively, without knowing why. She did not know why, or, at least, did not care to ask herself, even when she felt his arm around her and his lips on her bare shoulder. "This is all wrong and very silly," she said low, standing rigid.

"Wrong? What's wrong about it?" he whispered, clasping her savagely; "I can't help it. No man can *help* falling in love with a woman. What have I done? Kissed you once or twice the other day. Why, I'm *starving* — I might have that much, I think." He took his arms away with a movement of equal violence. "I tell you what I told you then, Letty. I don't ask *anything* of you. I don't ask anything but what — what you choose to give. Let me love you, that's all I want —!" Letty wondered if he believed his own fierce, incoherent words, believed what his eyes and voice denied in the very moment of utterance; he asked for nothing! he only wanted to love her! Did ever any man on earth stop *there*? Yet she yielded to his wild kisses again, unwilling to probe her own sensations.

"Letty, Letty, we're all ready. Have you lost something?" Mrs. William called from the hall below.

"Oh, no, we only stopped to take a last look at the picture," said Letty in a perfectly natural voice. It struck her that they were almost hideously secure.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE had been a time in Letty's life, say at the age of seventeen or thereabouts, when, like other young people of the same years, she had supposed that Life or what we call The World was a vast, complex, mysterious business, not to be understood save by profound study of men's acts and the vast, mysterious, complex machinery of motives underlying them. The magnitude and intricacy of human relations appalled her; it seemed as if nothing and nobody in the universe could possibly be direct and simple. In her later years, Letty discovered by slow degrees with periodically recurring fits of astonishment that, on the contrary, nothing more ludicrously simple than Life and The World was ever devised, and that her fellow-man was as plain as A, B, C! This, at any rate, is what Mrs. Letty decided out of her own observation and experience. "The sum of it all is, we are forever wanting something, it makes no difference if it is something different from hour to hour, and forever trying to get it," she said to herself, sagely. "Aunt Hattie wants a new dining-room set or a jardinière like Mrs. Thingamy's; so she nags Uncle William, or scrimps on the table, or buys it on the instalment plan—anyhow, she gets it. That's *one* style of human longing and human effort. Mr. McKinley wanted to be President of the United States, so *he* went after *that* — poor man! His methods weren't Aunt Hattie's, nor his aims — but it comes to the same thing in the long run. People like Jack's grandmother and poor old Aunt Helen want — why, they want to keep on living; the awful thing is that they make believe desperately they want a new set of teeth or a black silk dress, and all the while they know

in their hearts that they just want to stay alive, teeth or no teeth, dressed or naked — *tout bonnement*, as Aunt Helen would say. I wanted to get away from my home and my father — well, I did it, didn't I? It's not been all roses, but it was better than the other. What do I want now? I don't know. Webster Gates wants — bah, he wants *me*! He is just as simple about it as the rest of us!" She halted abruptly in the middle of these sufficiently grim reflections; she would not trust herself to speculate upon what might or might not be the outcome of Webster Gates's wants.

Gates, in his most introspective moments, was hardly so frank with himself; he would clothe his desire in fine, cloudy phrases long after Letty, with the extraordinary moral brutality of women, had told herself the whole truth. But, in the meanwhile, both of them were discreet; they knew their world. Gates's visits and gifts continued; it would have been as unsafe to break off suddenly as to keep on. Jack and Mrs. David were grown accustomed to Mr. Gates's manifold kindnesses, which, for, the rest, were never obtrusive, always well-timed, well-chosen, entirely free and open for all the world to see. It was all terrifyingly safe, terrifyingly easy, Letty thought more than once; she walked on the edge of the precipice, with eyes not always even half averted; it seemed as if, should she slip, she might recover the step unperceived — whether unscarred or not, who could say? It was odd, but invariably at such moments her dead and gone ancestress of the disastrously light behavior came into Letty's mind, with her smile, her great eyes, her delicately alluring figure, her uncanny likeness to Letty herself. Did the resemblance go any deeper, the young woman sometimes wondered with an interest which at once frightened and amused and shamed her. She could not help looking like her grandmother; but how about the other legacy?

She had reached this stage when an explosion occurred

in the William Breen household. It was to have been expected ; the wonder was that it had not come earlier. Mrs. William went weeping to Letty with an interminable tale of her guest's misdoings. Madame Von Donhoff drank brandy-and-water by the tumbler, by the pitcher, by the oceanful ; she kept the bottle on her mantelpiece ; her room smelled like a distillery, when it didn't smell like a barber shop. She told horrid stories ; she had dreadful French novels, and French comic magazines with unspeakable pictures in them lying around her room ; she made nasty remarks about Mrs. William's friends and *to* them ; the hired girl wouldn't stay ; the children were being corrupted ; the neighbors talked ! Letty knew that with every allowance for poor Mrs. William's temperament, all this was probably the literal truth. Old Helen, for her part, sneered and jeered and was very epigrammatic and amusing ; but it was evident the situation was intolerable. Something must be done.

"*We'll* have to take her. I ought to have done it in the beginning and prevented all this unhappiness and ill-feeling," Letty told Gates with regret. "It's a small matter to *me*, you know ; I know how to manage Aunt Helen. I can get along with anybody."

"You might for a while, but you couldn't stand it for any length of time," said Gates ; "you shan't do it — I won't let you. There's Mrs. David Dodsley to be considered, too. One old woman in the house is enough in all conscience," he finished impatiently, betraying his real objection. The fact was, Madame Helen, for all her years, was alarmingly sharp-eyed ; and only too ready with all sorts of suspicions, even if there had been no ground for them. Mr. Gates intimated that it was clearly Jack's business, William Breen's business, his own business, everybody's business, to get Madame Von Donhoff out of town if possible, out of the way, anyhow.

"The old lady doesn't care a pin for any of us, you know," he said to Jack, calling the latter into the rear office for a consultation; "we can't hurt *her* feelings as long as we take care of her and keep her in moderate comfort. And you know, Jack, it would be a shame to put that on your wife, to say nothing of yourself, that aren't any kin to her. Nobody can say how long it might last; one feels that it's inhuman to speculate about such a thing, but I'd be willing to bet on her seeing every one of *us* under the ground. She's indestructible — there isn't any *die* in her. Now I propose —" and he outlined a plan for sending Helen over to Letty's old home to the equally detrimental Mr. Henry Breen. "It'll be a menagerie, but let them get along together as best they can!" he declared with mingled amusement and irritation. "I can't think of anything else anyhow."

Jack listened, embarrassed and grateful. Although the other had touched upon it as lightly and indifferently as was possible, Jack knew that his employer, with characteristic liberality, was paying for all this — "putting up," as Jack phrased it to himself, when he had already "put up" as much as could reasonably be expected of him, rich man as he was, especially if you remembered that Madame Von Donhoff and the rest of the Breens had no real claim on him, and were his debtor many times over. Jack thought that there had never been such splendid generosity, so delicately bestowed; he was almost tongue-tied with admiration and gratitude.

"Don't say anything — I — I know all about it — I'm doing it as much for my own sake as for Cousin Letty's," Gates interrupted him hastily, cutting short his stammering acknowledgments. "We can't have the poor old thing around, you know, Jack — that's the plain truth. She's not much of a credit to the family. Er — ah —" he looked down, fingering the blotter, paper-knife and what-not on his desk; "is Cousin Letty

going to be busy this afternoon, do you suppose? I thought of calling her up and getting her to come over to my house to luncheon and — and have a talk about this. She's got such an idea of shouldering all the responsibilities, and not letting anybody else do anything for her, that I'm afraid she won't want to agree to this arrangement. I — I think I'll not ask your grandmother to come, Jack — you understand why. It's a — er — a family matter, and I don't feel, and I know Cousin Letty wouldn't feel either, as if we ought to talk before anybody in this plain way about — er — our Aunt Helen —”

“I see — I understand —” said Jack, eagerly sympathetic. “Of course you wouldn't want Grandma.” He began again, confusedly, “You're taking a lot of trouble, Mr. Gates; I — I don't know how to thank you —”

“Never mind it — don't talk about it — you know I don't like to be talked to about things —” said Gates, almost harshly; he made another nervous movement with his hands, looking out of the window, at a calendar on the wall, at the rose in a tall vase in front of him, everywhere but into his companion's face. For the moment, he shared Letty's shamed consciousness that this thing was too easy — too horribly safe and easy. Here were none of the cheap and trite deceptions to be met with in second-hand novels, on the stage, in the columns of the sensational journals. They were cousins, and wanted to discuss a family problem in decent privacy — what more natural? He himself had told her husband; for that matter, there sat old Boyle at his desk less than ten feet away, and heard every word! Gates's own rôle was very kindly and magnificent, as Jack felt it to be — a thought whereat, strangely enough, conscience stung him savagely. There was an instant when he almost hated Letty's husband for his blindness, his unquestioning, clean-minded confidence. It was

the shame of his own weakness that Gates was visiting on Jack's unconscious head. Yet he was capable of telling himself in the same breath that he could not help it, that it was nature and stronger than his will; he wanted her; he meant to have her. She had said that she would come to-day; he had spoken to her already, and all that talk to Jack was nothing but a blind — a piece of obvious prudence. She had said that she would come, apparently not perceiving that that act implied some surrender; but so little certain of her was he that he passed these hours in a kind of delicious torment of suspense, of hope and doubt and wild, blissful visions. Once or twice he called himself a fool; it was as if he had dived to unthinkable, bewildering depths, and on a sudden effort struggled back to the surface of the flood, and gasped the safe air. "I am crazy!" he thought — and incontinently plunged back amongst his sensuous dreams.

He hardly knew how he got through the time; he sent for his stenographer and dictated a couple of letters; the emissary of a broker's firm down the street came in; and there was a call from Mr. James Hatfield, of all men in the world. Mr. Hatfield's business concerned some property adjoining his grand new house in Bishop's Place in the Gates Subdivision, which he explained he wanted to buy to extend his grounds; he liked more yard, and, anyway, the house was too big to be stuck on one of these little pinched-up city lots; since moving in, he had noticed it; he felt cramped. He had talked to the architect, and the latter recommended — "put me onto" was Mr. Hatfield's ingenuously descriptive phrase — a landscape gardener, a Boston man, who would — er — design the grounds — lay 'em out, you know. These ordinary gardeners made things look just like a cemetery, or — or the Insane Asylum grounds, somehow. They had talked about a sunken garden, Italian style, you know — he didn't know much about

it himself, he guessed it would be pretty — and a nice, safe place for his little girl to play in. However, he didn't want to break himself up for any sunken garden ; as it was, he had told the architect that he thought likely there'd be more money sunk than garden — what would be the Estate's lowest figure — ? And after some bargaining, in which Mr. Boyle also bore a forward part, he finally took his leave, to "think it over." Gates, who in the beginning had forced himself to listen with his customary patience and courtesy, ended by being interested enough to forget for a while his pre-occupations.

"How talkative Policy Jimmie was!" he said to Boyle afterwards, in surprise ; "I never knew him to be so open about himself and his plans and his likes and dislikes before."

"Lots of men go at buying anything that way — kind of confidential, you know. They've an idea they'll do better if they get you to thinking they're dead easy," said the older man, grinning warily. Then he added in a kinder tone: "But I don't know — maybe he just wanted to talk a little to somebody. I guess the fellow's pretty lonesome now."

"Now?" said Gates, absently. The sunken garden made him think of gardens in general — of flowers — of pink roses — Killarneys — he would get some — she loved them — a couple of dozen in those slender silver vases on the luncheon-table. He would get them on the way home; no time to telephone and have them sent now. It was getting on towards one o'clock, he noted with a sudden thrill. In another hour — !

"Yes, his wife died the other day, didn't you know? I forget when it was — not long ago, though. Poor woman had some kind of tuberculosis — not the lung kind — something in the bones, I believe. Some new disease, anyhow," Mr. Boyle was saying.

"Eh, his wife? Oh, yes, Mrs. Hatfield, you mean ?

Yes, she was an invalid for years, they told me," said Gates, mechanically. He got up and got his overcoat; he could not sit still a minute longer. "I shan't be back this afternoon, Mr. Boyle; I've an engagement," he told the other; and went out. He passed Jack Dodsley rounding his shoulders over his desk in the outside room; Jack looked up with his bright, boyish smile. He was thirty-six by years — every way else the same boy for whom Gates had made this very place how long ago, back there in the '80's; and the older man looked at him now with the same tolerant and compassionate interest. "Hard at it, Jack, hey?" he said, lingering an instant.

"Yep. But I'm almost through with *this*," said Jack, gleefully, pointing to the ledger in front of him. "The old book's almost full — I'm right down to the last page. That's the last stroke of work I'll ever do in *it*, anyhow!"

Gates went on; should he get some violets, too, he pondered? He thought of the warm scent of them in his silent, shaded rooms; of Letty, her soft shape, the curve of her waist; his pulses tingled.

Half an hour or so later, young Mrs. Dodsley was beginning to think in a leisurely fashion about getting herself dressed "to go out to lunch with Mr. Gates," as she composedly informed Mrs. David. "He wants to talk to me about Aunt Helen, you know," Letty said; and added with a slight yawn, "It's a sort of family conference." The old lady, who had seen and been told enough to give her some idea of the present difficulties, nobly refrained from asking questions, although she was in a very lively state of curiosity. She had been a good deal interested and impressed by Madame Helen, whose eccentricities of appearance and taste and conversation she put down to years of life in foreign countries; and if there had been any question of taking sides, be sure Mrs. David would have enlisted for the Von Don-

hoff whole-heartedly against the abysmally "ordinary" Mrs. William Breen. "It must be awful for Letty to have people like that in her family," she thought; "and she's so proud and reticent."

"You'd better hurry, hadn't you?" she said now, glancing at the clock; "you'll be late."

"Oh, it doesn't hurt a man to wait a little," Letty said lightly; "I've been pretty busy this morning." This last statement was the strict truth — though, for the matter of that, so was everything else she had said. But Letty had been busier than usual, in some unintelligible effort to keep her mind off of what was coming. She had consented to go casually, as if the invitation signified no more than other invitations, persuading herself that it did not, with that incredible mixture of caution and bravado which was perhaps not more characteristic of her than it is of every woman. She did not intend to let anything "*happen*," she assured herself inwardly; but there were moments when she was seized with a terror of her own thoughts — of what she *might* think. The strange thing was that she ceased to be honest with herself precisely at the point when Gates tore and flung aside the last rag of his own pretences and faced his desire naked and unashamed. The man's frame of mind was more creditable than the woman's when all is said; now, at least, he went about his end, straight and hardily, without compunction or excuses. Whereas Letty herself could not have followed the doublings of her own mind; and shrank, yielded, longed, wondered, and was struck with shame in the same breath.

She finished her toilette for the street at last, decided that it was still too early to start, and sat down with the morning paper, of which, however, she could scarcely have told one word or one item of news, after ten minutes' diligent scanning. She moved about the house, gave an order or two to her servant, sat down again;

she was determined to be late, determined to keep him hovering desperately. The clock struck half past one; it was the same gilt and glass confection which had been Gates's wedding-present to them ten years ago. Letty began to put on her gloves slowly, with elaborate care; they were a present from him, too, a box of a dozen or so pairs having arrived the other day. She thought like him of the dusky, big rooms, the rich disorder of their furnishings, her great-grandmother's portrait smiling frankly on the wall — what a chaperon! Letty smiled herself, looking so startlingly like Mistress Elinor that any one, seeing her, would have cried out at it. She got up with a little resolute and even devil-may-care movement, and went towards the door. Her hand was on the knob when the telephone rang.

Letty turned back with a gesture of impatience; when she was ready to go, she was *ready to go*, she used to say of herself, quaintly. She went to the instrument, which had begun another maddening long jingling, and snatched it up. "Yes? This is East one-o-two-o. What is it?" she said.

"Is that Mrs. Dodsley?" came from the other end.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I mean Mrs. Jack Dodsley," said the voice. Nobody ever called Letty's husband John Dodsley; Jack he was to every one, younger than he or older, and perhaps that fact, of itself, may serve to index him. Letty said, "Yes, this is young Mrs. Dodsley," and waited. It seemed as if she could hear or feel the person at the other end of the line breathing excitedly; at any rate, he — it was a man — did not speak again for a second or two, so that Letty, with one eye on the clock, repeated: "Yes, this is young Mrs. Dodsley. What do you want?"

"Well — er — Mrs. Dodsley, this is Mr. Boyle speaking — Mr. Boyle at the office, you know. You know who it is, don't you —?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Boyle, of course. How do you do?" said Letty, pleasantly. She had often met the old gentleman, and was a little amused at the conscious nervousness of his manner; she knew him to be not at all a ladies' man.

"Ah — er — how do you do? Is there anybody there, Mrs. Dodsley? Is there anybody in the house with you, I mean? Ah — er — somebody of your own family, I mean, or *anybody*?"

"Mrs. David Dodsley is upstairs. What is the matter?" said Letty, quickly. She was not frightened, only startled and wondering; but Mr. Boyle evidently thought he detected fright in her voice, or was moved in some way himself, for he began at once in a tone plainly meant to soothe and reassure: —

"Why — er — don't be alarmed — I just wanted to be sure that you weren't all alone there. I — ah — the fact is, we've — we've had a slight accident here, Mrs. Dodsley, and — and —"

"Is somebody hurt? Is it Jack?" said Letty.

"Why — ah — yes — he —"

There was a silence. Letty stood at the telephone as if frozen — as indeed she felt. In a moment more, Mr. Boyle said anxiously: "Mrs. Dodsley — Mrs. Dodsley! Are you there?" She heard him say to somebody in a horror-struck aside: "Suppose she's fainted! My God, man, I *told* you this wasn't any way to let her know!"

"I am here, Mr. Boyle," said Letty, in a clear and steady voice; she had to stop and collect herself at every few words, but she went on: "Tell me at once. Has Jack been killed?"

"No — no, oh, no! He — they're bringing him out to you in an ambulance. They thought I'd better telephone to warn you. He fell — he had a fall — Oh, my Lord, one of you fellows tell her — I can't —"

Letty heard a rattling at the instrument, and confu-

sion of voices; she stood, tranced, rigidly waiting — waiting. Jack's grandmother came out on the landing at the head of the stairs, and said: "Letty, are you there *still*? What are you telephoning about? You're going to be awfully late."

Another voice began at the telephone. It said, carefully, "Mrs. Dodsley, are you there?"

"I haven't fainted; I am here," said Letty, moving her tongue and lips with disproportionate and painful effort, such as the futile strength we put forth in dreams.

"That's right — that's brave!" said the voice, kindly and encouragingly; "it's not so bad, you know; it's going to be all right — just you keep up — keep strong. I'm Doctor Lloyd — you don't know me — I'm one of the internes at St. Francis. Your husband's been pretty badly hurt, Mrs. Dodsley — it was the elevator-shaft — he didn't see the gate was open. What? I can't hear you —"

"I didn't say anything. What are they doing with him? Where is he?"

"They'll have him out at the house in a few minutes, now. There's a surgeon with them — it's going to be all right, you know —"

"Is he — will he know me?" Letty managed to ask.

"Why, yes — yes, I guess so. He's been pretty badly hurt, you know. But he came to, just before they started, and said your name. It was her name he said, wasn't it, Mr. Boyle?"

Letty dropped the telephone in the middle of some consoling speech from the doctor. Poor Jack — poor Jack! He had come to and was asking for her — asking for her! Pity, tenderness, maternal and defensive and protecting, swept over her; her poor Jack! She went to the door for the second time just as the Red Cross wagon wheeled into their street; and presently they were carrying the stretcher up the steps.

BOOK FOURTH : LETTY

CHAPTER I

THE millionaire Mr. Hatfield moved into the imposing mansion he had builded for himself out of his gains, from what mysterious sources, bucket-shop or other, it was now nobody's business to inquire, some time in the fall or winter. Not long afterwards he bought of the Riggins Estate and added to his domain a handsome parcel of ground, running back from the house on Bishop's Place quite to Charlotte Street, with some fine old forest trees, elms, and so on, still standing on it, and a spring with a dilapidated old shanty over it that had once supplied the Gates Farm, in a little hollow towards the middle. In March, as early as the earth could be turned, the workmen appeared in this territory with a mighty display of picks and ploughs, to the great interest and delight of all the servants and other back-door and kitchen-yard gentry of Charlotte Street, whose rear windows looked upon the nabob's premises. There were to be terraces, hedges of box and yew, pointed poplars guarding the vistas here or there, crescent-shaped marble benches, stone-rimmed basins, balustrades, pergolas; lo, already were to be seen the crates of decorative tiles, terra-cotta, faience, architectural ironwork, the Lord knows what imported from the Lord knows where! In the distance the high-pitched roof and gables of the Hatfield house dominated this landscape magnificently; one might even see at a lesser and humbler level, but still dignified, the top of the Hatfield stable and the garage which had recently been erected, lending distinction to its corner of the view. "I'd be

satisfied with the stable to live in—it's more suitable to my means and station," Mrs. Archer Lewis had been heard to say in mock humility. And she suggested to Mr. Hatfield, meeting that gentleman for the first time about this date, that he ought to keep a band of Tuscan peasants, Savoyard or Sicilian wine-growers, or Spanish brigands on hand to dance and warble across his garden once in a while and so complete the picture—"and have a pair of lovers spooning over the sun-dial R.U.E. — oh, it would be perfect!" To which Policy Jim—a name which, by the way, had now fallen into entire disuse and oblivion!—replied very promptly and coolly that if she would volunteer for the leading lady's part, he would attend personally to the spooning, accompanying this retort with a glance from his hard, light-colored eyes that somewhat discomfited Mrs. Kitty; the big man's negligent impudence matched her own.

Thus did Mr. Hatfield's affairs—which, however uninteresting so far, are yet of some moment to this history—thus did his affairs progress, and those of Mrs. Lewis, of society at large, of the world itself, notwithstanding the fact that life and time seemed to be standing still (a trick which is their especial secret) for two or three people here and there. The windows of No. 12 commanded a view of the Bishop's Place house and improvements like those of other residents on Charlotte Street; but nobody spent much time looking out of them these days. It was a quiet, subdued place; even the grocerymen and errand boys amiably tried to govern their boots and voices within its porch. They parleyed at the kitchen door and came away looking for the instant sympathetically grave. Sometimes a foreman of one of the gangs of earthworkers on the Hatfield property, struck by the tragic reserve of the house, would make inquiries; any child or servant-girl in the neighborhood could tell him. The gentleman was awful sick;

he fell three stories down the elevator — don't you remember, it was in the paper? — just walked right into it, you know, without ever seeing that the door was open; that was against the law, too, he ought to get big money for that, or *she* ought. Yes, he was hurt bad — hey? — why, all over, you know, pretty much all over, internal and something in his head, too, but he was going to get well, the doctor said. It was going on two months now. The lady with the black hair was his wife; she hardly ever left him night or day. He knew her and asked for her right from the first — she was the only person he *did* know — hey? Why, the doctor didn't say — doctors won't, you know, especially about a thing like that. The doctor just said it would take time, and it would be a long while before Mr. Dodsley could go back to business — well, of course, you know, they wouldn't want it to get around that there was anything the matter *that* way — and like enough, the doctor himself couldn't tell for certain —

“They'd talk that way to kind of let his folks down easy, anyhow, s'posing he never *did* come right,” the foreman would generally comment sagaciously. “Man seldom ever gets *all* over getting hurt on the head — except he's a nigger. Wouldn't wonder if he never was good for anything again — hard on his wife, ain't it? Did he have an accident policy, d'ye know?” Their curiosity was friendly and harmless, on the whole; even Letty, who sometimes caught a word or two as she went upstairs and down or came unexpectedly into the kitchen, could not be offended by it. And five or six weeks later, when in the lengthening and gentle spring days, she got her invalid out for an airing in the privacy of their little yard behind the house, these rough teamsters and ditch diggers showed the courtesy which is true kindness of heart by pretending not to notice when poor Jack was frightened by the steam-roller, and cried and begged Letty to make it go away — make it go

away — ! She had to take him into the house again. "My God, that's awful, ain't it?" Bill said to Dennis, as they rested on their spades an instant to watch the retreat. Perhaps at this same time, or it may be a few weeks later still, that sprightly collector and purveyor of information, Mrs. Archer Lewis, imparted to her husband a piece of news which had filtered from one house to another by what devious and dubious channels — nurses, doctors' offices, doctors' wives, who knows? All at once it permeated the atmosphere of society like a scent. "His mind's completely gone," said Mrs. Lewis, retailing the gossip at the breakfast table. "When Sue told me, I just said, 'Well, there wasn't very much of it to go, and I guess it didn't have to go very far'!"

Her Archer did not laugh, however. "Don't talk like that, Kitty," he said shortly and very soberly; "it's a dreadful thing." Mrs. Kitty, who was sometimes, though she never would have owned to it, a little afraid of her husband in his reproving moods, rattled her coffee-cups, but was obediently silent.

It was the truth. And if, as Mrs. Lewis hinted, Jack Dodsley had not been overintelligent or gifted in any way, or a particularly valuable citizen, none the less a sad and terrible judgment had fallen upon him — likewise a cruel and undeserved, as you or I might have thought, as Letty his wife thought. He may not have been bright, but he had a better heart than many a brighter; and there are a deal of villains and scalawags at large and prospering in their evil or stupid fashion whom Providence might have dealt with sternly, one would think, rather than this honest and harmless man. The sight of his sufferings, which the poor fellow bore with a heart-rending patience, roused Letty to strange furies of indignation, pity, and impotent resentment; it seemed to her an outrage against justice and humanity, for she was a fair-minded and humane woman. The

most loving wife that ever breathed could not have tended her husband with a more consistent, unwearied devotion; the doctors and nurses observed her with an enthusiastic admiration both professional and personal. They went away chanting praises and spreading everywhere reports of Mrs. Dodsley's self-command and self-sacrifice, her courage, her capacity. Yet perhaps these qualities were less tested during the first weeks when Jack's condition was the most serious and the outcome still uncertain than later when it began to be apparent by slow and dreadful degrees that if his body would recover, his mind would not. Letty had fatalistically obliged herself to accept that fact before the doctors reluctantly hinted it to her. She did not rebel; she had no alternations of hope and blank disappointment such as Mrs. David went through. She made up her mind to the worst; and if things should turn out, after all, not quite so bad as was prophesied, felt that she would be somehow proportionately the gainer.

In fact, things might have been much worse; Jack might have been queer or violent (Letty said to herself) or weak in some way horrible even to imagine. It was something to be thankful for that he was on the contrary perfectly docile and sweet-tempered, appealing rather than repellent; he did not develop any distressing habits or tendencies; as near as it would be possible to describe him, he was like a nice child of seven or eight years old. His dependence on his wife was infinitely touching; he clung to her, followed her about the house, or would sit obediently in a corner for an hour, if she bade him 'be good,' cried when she left him, and cried again with delight when she returned. Yet he seemed to be without any conception of their relation to each other, though he called her "Letty," and at moments — which, however, occurred less and less frequently as time went on, until they ceased altogether — would speak or act as if, for a flash, some remembrance

of his past self and life had visited him ; as when, one morning, he waked her up, telling her it was late and he must get down to the office, or another time when he asked if Mr. Gates had gone to Europe ? In five minutes, he had forgotten it all, equally what he had wanted and what Letty had answered. Yet he could still read and write, as Letty found upon trial, though he never did either without prompting ; and could be trusted with five cents to go out and buy a paper, although counting was a business of great labor and slowness with him. His manners were as careful as they had ever been ; indeed, he was so natural in so many ways that Mrs. David Dodsley at times felt firmly convinced that there was nothing whatever the matter ; she would admit that he was not yet in his usual health and still suffered from *shock*, but — “If Jack would only exert his *will power*, he would overcome that timidity and forgetfulness. It’s nothing but nerves,” the old lady would declare impatiently. She was not one-half so considerate and gentle with him as Letty, whose enlightened humanity outweighed, in practice, all the older woman’s affection. Letty did not suggest the use of his *will power* to this poor broken creature ; she intervened many times to save him from his grandmother’s exhortations and services which too often displayed that sheer brutality of misdirected kindness with which we are all familiar. Letty nursed Jack, interested and entertained him, beguiled his time with a dozen different games, stories, and simple devices ; shielded and cared for him in ways he liked and could understand, with an extraordinary, even beautiful, discernment and sympathy. Was there some spur of remorse to Mrs. Jack’s ceaseless effort ? How should we know ? She was, I repeat it, a very humane woman, and would undoubtedly have done as much without any urging from an uneasy conscience.

In the meanwhile, no matter what misfortunes befell

the head of the family, the butcher and the baker must be paid, to say nothing of the doctor and the druggist. William Breen was the first person to remember these sordid facts, and to realize that his niece was probably not better prepared to meet this adversity than her neighbor. William, who was not nearly so good-looking and brilliantly endowed as the rest of the Breen tribe, — or as they thought themselves, — owned some serviceable traits of integrity and unselfishness which those ornamental members of society conspicuously lacked. He went to see Letty regularly and stood by her staunchly. "Never mind — don't think about it now — Lord knows you've got enough to worry you — that's all right — you'll pay me some day," said William, diffidently kind; and he took off his spectacles and wiped them, and blew his nose with great vigor when he left the house after seeing her with her husband. Mrs. Von Donhoff had already been despatched to Muskingum Street whence she wrote Letty a long letter in French, beginning with a page or so of highly appropriate, pious, and scriptural-sounding remarks conveying consolation and resignation; and passing on to an exceedingly lively, satirical description of her reception by the household, and her present environment. "It can be seen that your grandfather is no longer here," she wrote; "my brother was not at all democratic — but not at all, as you know! At present, one would not know how to be more so. Your papa, my dear, and this ancient Elizabeth, who always makes me to remember the Meg Merrilies of Sir Walter Scott, are all that there is of the most democratic. We eat in the kitchen; Madame Merrilies rules us with some little of severity; it is the hand of iron, but without the velvet glove! Your father obeys her with a perfect amiability; doubtless he has suffered in the past when recalcitrant. Between us, my niece, the old Merrilies has reason sometimes; she interposes herself between your father and the ladies of the

neighborhood who would otherwise become somewhat too intimate. What would you? Men are men. . . .”

And there was a good deal more in the same vein which Letty read with a kind of bitter indifference. She was surprised to discover how little she cared what her father and aunt did, or what became of them; the idea that they might disgrace the family left her unmoved. Say they did, what of it? “Disgrace the Breen family, indeed?” she thought, sardonically amused; “it’s time we gave up troubling our heads about that, I think. My grandfather was a beggar, and my father was a thief, and how about yourself, Letty Breen? If you are any better than your forbears, — than Mrs. Elinor, for instance, — it is luck and nothing else. And as to your present circumstances, you made your bed and you can lie on it!” With which stern — and entirely just — conclusion, she would sit down to a game of jackstraws with Jack, and entertain him for an hour, or a whole afternoon, with the utmost patience and good humor.

She saw Gates only once in all this while, although he had at the first come repeatedly to the house to inquire, had sent unimaginable comforts and delicacies to the injured man, and had conveyed to Letty through Mr. Boyle the assurance that Jack’s illness and temporary absence from work, were not to interfere with the regular drawing of his salary. Letty thanked him, also through Mr. Boyle; her hands were too full for ordinary conventionalities. On this occasion she had taken Jack out for his afternoon exercise. The year was going into the summer; it would soon be six months since the catastrophe, and Jack’s bodily injuries, helped out by a good constitution and cleanly life, were healed and gone, having left him almost without a scar. At a slight distance, he looked like himself. His walk was hesitating, however, and he kept an anxious clutch on Letty’s arm, casting timorous glances about, and starting at chance

sounds. The noisy, exuberant open air invariably frightened him; he could not get used to it, longing for the safe quiet of four walls with permanent and recognizable exits and entrance-ways; and in particular Letty found it hard to persuade and encourage him into crossing the street, which seemed to Jack a prodigious adventure, wherein one dared sprinkling-carts, and bicycles, and half-grown boys riotously throwing baseballs, and numberless other dangers. She was enticing him by various patient tricks to this expedition when Gates, who, indeed, was on his way to their house, caught sight of them. Letty saw him on the other side of the street, and nodded and smiled without embarrassment; the truth was she was so absorbed in her present cares that everything else, her whole past life, even including Webster Gates, except at odd moments when she had time to think about it, seemed to her incredibly small, distant, and unreal.

"Come on, Jack," she repeated for the twentieth time, with the same untiring kindness; "see, there's nothing in the way, now. Now's the time — take hold of my hand."

"There's something coming up there, Letty, there's a big red thing coming. I — I think it's a steam-engine, isn't it?" said Jack, hanging back.

Gates, who had heard all the reports about Jack Dodsley and moreover knew from his own physician that they were true, braced himself to the ordeal, and crossed the street and went up to them. It relieved him incalculably to find that there was nothing physically repugnant about the poor fellow; he had somehow associated the mental trouble with some sort of visible distortion, he didn't know what. "How do you do, Jack?" he said, trying to speak in a commonplace style, and held out his hand.

Jack looked at him in that habitual earnest fashion which was now so startlingly natural and unnatural at

once, and took off his hat and shook hands, smiling brightly and blankly. Then he felt for Letty's arm, which he had dropped for the instant, turning to her with a puzzled, inquiring expression; it was painfully strange that he should remember so well the empty social forms, when he had plainly forgot nearly everything else.

"You know me, don't you?" said Gates, wretchedly distressed, not daring to look at Letty.

"It's Mr. Gates, you know, Jack. Of course you remember Mr. Gates," she said.

"Mr. Gates," Jack repeated, and smiled again. "Of course, Mr. Gates." There was something about his sweet, uncomprehending civility that seemed to the two others absolutely heart-breaking; but Letty had already so schooled herself to the spectacle that she viewed it with no such cringing as Gates, to whom the meeting was an intolerable nightmare. He had known it would be bad, but not so bad as this; he wildly thought that he would have given his right hand, given ten years of his life, to have prevented this calamity. Here stood the man whom he, Webster Gates, would have wronged as much as one man can wrong another, innocent, helpless, all but imbecile. And here stood himself sane and strong and guilty as hell, he thought in a spasm of hysterical self-disgust — guilty as hell! He was not to blame for Jack's misfortune, yet conscience cried out at him with curses.

"Look, Letty, it is a steam-engine. Let's go back — let's go back home!" said Jack, tremulously, plucking at her sleeve, and pointing so that the others saw what he meant — no steam-engine, indeed, but a large, magnificent bright red automobile approaching them at a very mild gait, considering its size and evident prowess. As they still hesitated on the crossing, it slowed down politely, and began a decorous honking which alarmed Jack even more. "Never mind — we'll stay on this

side. We're safe, you know, Jack — I'll take care of you — I'll take care of you," said Gates, quickly, as the other crowded back scared and ready to whimper in spite of Letty's efforts. "Oh, my God, I can't stand much more of this!" he cried within him, sick at heart.

But now the machine drew to a standstill almost in front of them; there were only two passengers, a gentleman and a little girl. "Stop there — whoa, will you, Antoine!" cried the gentleman, taking a big, expensive black cigar out of his mouth to shout this command at the chauffeur. And the little girl, who had likewise been screaming excitedly and peremptorily, hopped out and ran up to them, with her white dress crumpled and disordered, and a green ribbon flying, above her little round, shining, freckled face, from her hair, which latter was thick and straight and of an incendiary redness of hue.

"I know you — you're my Letty-lady!" she began surprisingly, addressing Letty in her high, childish, hasty voice. "I see you all the time over our back fence. What's the matter with him? It's your sick man, ain't it? What's the matter? Is he afraid? Tell him we won't hurt him. We won't hurt you," she said to Jack authoritatively. "You needn't to be so scared. We won't let it hurt you — honest we won't!"

"That's very nice — you're very kind, my dear," Letty said, momentarily taken aback, but recovering; all the children on Charlotte Street were familiar with the sight of her and her "sick man." "But you mustn't stop your ride. We're going back to the house now."

"No, *no* — you come along with us. You come and ride with us. If he'd come once, he wouldn't ever be afraid any more, would you?" said the child, taking Jack by the hand, confidently, and tugging at him. "I used to be afraid when it made that noise, too," she explained to him; "but 'tain't anything — it's just

when he winds it up, you know. Come on and go for a ride. It's lots of fun, ain't it, Poppa?"

The big man got out, too, and came over to them; he nodded to Gates with a passing glance. "I guess you know me, Mrs. Dodsley," he said; "this is my little girl, Hilda. How d'ye do, Dodsley?" He was not at all embarrassed, and saluted them in a natural, hearty, and unconstrained manner that moved Gates to wonder and some envy.

"It's Mr. Hatfield," Letty told her husband.

"Come on," the little girl urged, holding Jack's hand. "What's his name?" she said to Letty.

"My name's Jack?" said the other, unexpectedly, and smiled down at her timidly, yet with open pleasure.

"All right, Jack, you come on, then. Can't I take him a ride? You don't mind, do you?" she appealed to Letty.

"Why, I don't think —"

"Oh, yes, let him come along—it'll do him good," said Hatfield, good-naturedly; "I'll tell my fellow not to go fast and scare him. I never let him speed her up, anyhow, when I've got the kid with me—it kind of worries me. Now don't you bother, Mrs. Dodsley, he'll be safe, and he'll have a grand time." And Letty consenting, Jack, for a wonder, followed his new little friend into the body of the dread-inspiring monster without any more coaxing. The child—alas, the *two* children were equally elated; they laughed together when the machine began to move, and Jack waved his hat happily.

Gates went heavily homeward, and let himself into his house and went upstairs in gradually increasing lowness of spirits. His servants had lately been engaged in house-cleaning, a business which they kept out of his view as much as possible; so that there was no confusion in the dining room, where the flowers

and glass and linen were as elegant and orderly as usual. "Put on another plate this evening. I'm going to telephone to Mr. Boyle to come up," he directed the butler, glancing in as he passed the door. The picture-room was all dismantled, furniture removed or thrust aside in favor of step-ladders and pails, curtains down and an unaccustomed strong light streaming in through the high windows with all the heat and radiance of the June day. Gates looked in there, too, and spoke to the housemaid mounted on a pair of steps cleaning an electric-light fixture and droning *Love me and the world is mine* to herself in a cautious undertone; she jumped and faced around at the sound of his voice, and listened abashed, but curious. "Will it be for some time, this time, Mr. Gates?" she ventured respectfully, when he had finished.

"I don't know," Gates said.

Mr. Boyle repeated the same question that evening about eight o'clock as the two men sat together towards the end of the meal. "How long d'ye think you'll be gone this time, Daniel?" said Mr. Boyle, wrinkling up his eyes and turning his cigar with relish. It had been a good dinner, although Gates had eaten little, and Boyle himself being a temperate man of plain tastes would have preferred steak and fried potatoes to all the "ongtrays, side-dishes, whatever you call 'em," as he used to remark contemptuously, known to the world of cooks. But he liked the wine and the quiet talk; and it struck him now, surveying the other, that his host had not appeared to be enjoying either much. "I guess you need the change. You aren't looking quite up to the mark."

Gates moved impatiently at the question. "I don't know," he said again; "six months perhaps — more or less — I haven't made any plans yet. I'll get the first steamer I can. The rush to Europe is on just now — I may have some trouble."

"Somebody's always giving up their passage at the last minute, though."

They smoked for a while in silence. "Ever hear from that — that old trouble nowadays?" the older man asked at length, eying the younger with a kind of diffident anxiety. He was speaking of an organic disorder which had threatened Gates's health all his youthful days — and few there were besides old Boyle, who had seen him grow up, from whom Gates would have tolerated the reference. He was unreasonably sensitive about it; it irritated him to be sick, and irritated him no less to be consoled with on the subject.

"Once in a while — nothing to speak of," he answered briefly with a slight frown.

After another silence, Mr. Boyle cleared his throat, shifted a little in his seat, and said: "Say, Daniel, you don't happen to have heard from Mrs. Dodsley — the young one, I mean — here lately — anything in particular, that is?"

"I saw her to-day," said Gates, with an effort. "I saw them both — Jack, that is —"

The other waited an instant for him to finish, then went on himself. "Because I had a note, or rather a letter, from her this morning. It's curious, I was going to speak to you about this — er — this very matter. Her having written in the way she does makes the whole thing easier." He got the letter out, picking over a sheaf of envelopes and at last finding the right one, addressed in Letty's firm, dashing hand that Gates knew so well, with what seemed to the latter a maddening deliberation. "She says — um —" said Mr. Boyle, adjusting his eyeglasses to run it over. Gates held out his hand impatiently. "Well, maybe you'd better read it yourself," said Mr. Boyle, taking the hint.

Gates read the letter through — it was not a long document — and sat staring at it until Mr. Boyle said expectantly, "Well?"

"Well — " said the other, rousing himself wearily, "I — I don't know — " He passed a hand over his eyes, and repeated, "I don't know what to do about it, Boyle. She's — she's a high-spirited woman, and if she balks this way at taking the money any longer, I can't exactly force it on her — but —"

"What she says is very sensible, *I think*," said his old prime minister, warmly; "it's very creditable —" ("if it isn't all bluff!" he added to himself in a mental parenthesis) "and also unusual. She's the first person I've ever come across that didn't get to thinking the money one gave 'em was their own!"

"Anyhow, something's got to be done. I don't think they've got anything else to live on," said Gates, moving restlessly. "They can't have saved anything. Jack's spent the best years of his life working for us, you know, Mr. Boyle. It was working for us that he got hurt —"

"Oh, pshaw, that's pretty far-fetched, Daniel. He was going out to get his lunch when he got hurt. It might have happened anywhere. Suppose a chimney-pot had fallen on him as he was going along the street on Sunday — it would have been the same thing. Of course I understand your feeling; I'm not against giving him something. Mrs. Dodsley seems to me to be very reasonable; she'll take a sum down, or a — a pension, you know. She knows, of course, Jack ought to have *something*. But you aren't *made* of money, and as long as she gives you the chance —"

"She'd do it if she were starving — you don't know her the way I do," said Gates, almost angrily.

"By George, she's not much like the rest of her family, then!" said the other, with a grin.

"Anyway, the poor fellow can't last forever," Gates went on without noticing him; "it can't be but a few years —"

"Oh, don't you fool yourself! No reason why he

shouldn't live right along. His body's all right now, and he hasn't got any mind to help wear it out. You can persuade his wife to take something—I think a regular allowance will be the best way to fix it. They've got relatives that'll do something for 'em, haven't they? There's all that big Duncan connection—"

Gates got up abruptly with a nervous gesture. "Have it your own way! Do the best you can," he said in a tired and strained voice; "don't let's talk any more about it!"

After Mr. Boyle had gone, Gates sat a long while by the table in a sombre attitude with his head on his hand. He was thinking of Letty—not with passion, not with desire now. Passion and desire withered away in the blighting presence of Jack's affliction; they could not live beside that horror. Gates thought of her, perhaps for the first time, with respect.

CHAPTER II

MISS BRUNHILDA HATFIELD, for a young woman of some seven or eight years, had had the most profound and varied experience of the world as it displays itself in boarding-house parlors, and the elevators of apartment buildings, and the corridors of hotels, in shops and on the streets and about the parks of numberless cities, along the verandas of winter and summer resorts, and the decks of ocean-going steamboats — I say the small Miss Hatfield knew and had seen more of life under these circumstances surely than any person of her age and sex since little girls first began to be. The sole thing she did not know was a home, never having had one of her own, and seldom visiting other people's. Her earliest recollections presented the boarding-houses, hotels, and so on, dimly, as rather shabby, fly-blown places smelling of coffee and stale meats; and the padded red carpets upon which she used to crawl and play were frayed and dusty and diversified with fascinating holes that held out splendid possibilities in the way of mining and exploration. She had no nurse in those all but prehistoric days, and was troubled very little with such rites as washing and dressing and being made to sit up at table. Instead, her wardrobe was supplied mainly with pink and blue calico gaberdines of exceedingly simple cut and workmanship, and not too often changed; and she was given slabs of bread and butter and sugar to munch as she sat on the floor. There were always half a dozen or more women — ladies, Miss Hatfield was rigidly trained to say — lounging about in beltless and strikingly negligent costumes in her mother's

room, or else her mother, similarly attired, was lounging in their rooms; their conversation, which was surpassingly fluent and copious, and accompanied by a great deal of giggling laughter, was invariably broken short off on the approach of any personage in trousers, or of Brunhilda herself. "Sh-h, your hubby'll hear you, Ide!" "Oh, rats! I guess he *knows*. He wouldn't be a *man*, if he didn't!" "Say, look out, girls, there's the kid!" "Well, she ain't old enough to catch on. Go ahead, Mame, tell the rest of it." Thus did all lady grown-ups discourse and behave. When they went out in the public places mentioned, they discarded their flowing robes and their slippers with the run-down heels, and painfully arrayed themselves in tightly laced armor, and "did" their hair in beautiful rolls and waves, and put on large hats with lovely curling and drooping ostrich plumage and figured lace veils, and smelled of violet powder or fancy soap. The gentlemen grown-ups wore silk hats and diamond studs and large, heavy rings and watch chains; they were not in the least secretive about *their* talk, which was always very loud and vigorous and flavored with references to the Almighty, and the future state of their own and other people's souls and bodies, and many matters, besides, of a highly fruity or marrowy nature. They smelled, too,—everything and everybody smelled of something,—of the fancy soaps, and of perfumes and tobacco and spice, and other things not so easily recognizable. When they were at home, there were always bottles and sticky glasses on the tables in their rooms—you might hear them clinking all day long. Sometimes they came in very late at night, stumbling up the stairs, hiccoughing and swearing in the dark; sometimes there were thrilling episodes in the halls which Brunhilda heard the other ladies and gentlemen describe as So-and-So having a racket with somebody else, a "landlady" or a "landlord" or an "agent" or a

"laundryman" or a "collector" — yea, sometimes even a married lady and gentleman would have a racket, when Brunhilda's mother and the rest would tiptoe out above-stairs in their draperies and listen with interest. Brunhilda herself was not at all interested; she was not an inquisitive child, and had a turn for minding her own affairs. She was her Paw all over, her mother used to say.

Brunhilda's father and mother were a pair who never had a racket. The Paw whom she so closely resembled was too big and hard-faced for anybody to risk a dispute with him; to say nothing of the fact that he was in Brunhilda's observation, at any rate, not much given to talk, and rather indifferent, on the whole, to what her mother said or did. This lady, when she was not making those outdoor excursions in lily-of-the-field gorgeousness we have spoken of — excursions on which, by the way, she rarely took Brunhilda, whose wardrobe was indeed not suited to them, — this lady spent most of her time in bed; and had her meals sent up on a frowsy tray which — when the plates and cups and small bird bath-tubs in which it was served were emptied — it became Brunhilda's duty to remove from the bedside and deposit outside their door on the floor, a position it not infrequently occupied until time for the next one. Once the youngster let it fall with an appalling clatter and destruction of queen's-ware, for which her mother punished her with shrill and angry words and buffetings of a surprising sharpness from such an invalid. Brunhilda did not complain, being a stolid sort of little girl. She scarcely ever cried; even when she fell downstairs and cut her mouth to the bone, and bumped her eye, she bore it silently, though her mother scolded her severely for that, too. "Well, I hope to goodness she'll heal up no worse looking than she was before, anyhow!" she remarked to a friend, surveying the child's swollen and discolored face. "It's lucky she ain't pretty, or

I'd be worried to death over every scratch she got!" Her father, however, was a good deal concerned when he discovered the damage on coming home that evening; he sent for a doctor (something which nobody had thought worth while), went out himself and bought a wonderful bunch of hothouse grapes for the small sufferer, and encouraged her with promises of a new doll. And that night, hearing the little girl sobbing in a subdued fashion with her head under the pillow of her crib, got up in the dark, and went over to her and asked with an amazing gentleness what was the matter. "Does it hurt, Kiddo?" he said; "tell Pop where it hurts."

"Naw!" said Brunhilda, gulping; "I — I was j-just wishin' — I wisht I was pretty! I l-like pretty people!"

Her father heard this avowal without comment. "Well, now — well, now — just watch out you don't wake your mother up," he whispered, petting her awkwardly; and Brunhilda went to sleep at last, feeling somehow consoled. He kept his promise about the doll; indeed, he supplied her with a great plenty and variety of toys and picture-books, of which she had had hardly any heretofore, took her to the circus, and even bought her clothes — embroidered white dresses, and a pink silk sash, and a little woolly coat and cap in which she took a serious pride. "Thinks more of her than he does of *me*," Brunhilda heard her mother telling somebody; the child could not have understood, even if she had detected, the note of jealousy in the voice.

Miss Hatfield never could determine exactly how long this stage of her existence lasted; it was a time seemingly endless, yet vague. One may suppose that their way of life changed by slowly bettering degrees; but Brunhilda could remember none of them. It always seemed to her that whereas in the places called Yanapolis and Louahvull and *Newerleens* they had lived as

described, in the place called N'Yawk, there was a sudden and startling and altogether glorious difference! The smells and dirty carpets and ladies in kimonos vanished from off the face of the globe; they were replaced by great shiny rooms with pillars of variegated marbles and marble floors, and gilded ironwork, and curtains of lace and brocade at the lofty windows, and green growing trees in pots, and people eating at little tables, and music playing far off and dreamily while they did it. The ladies whom one saw were always dressed up — *always!* Even the superior lady in the plain black dress and short ruffled white apron and white ruffy thing on her head, who made Brunhilda's bed and flirted a duster around their rooms of a morning, even this lady, whom Brunhilda's mother called "ma'am," had a kind of dressed-up look; even the gentleman in the blue suit and gold buttons who brought the ice-water and whom Brunhilda's mother addressed as "mister," appeared to be a person of distinction. N'Yawk was the place where Poppa bought the big glass breastpin and earrings for her mother that cost thirty-eight hundred dollars. Presently Brunhilda had a lady in a black dress and white frills to take care of her alone — a lady who made her eat with a fork and taught her what a napkin was good for. Brunhilda had new dresses — and *more* new dresses! She went to the theatre, and driving in the Park, and to a beach where she saw the sea for the first time, and Poppa swam out in it with her on his back, magnificent and terrifying to relate, and where she played happily with other youngsters in the sand. N'Yawk was also the place where her mother was taken very ill, and they found her on the bathroom floor in a fainting-fit; and that was the end of N'Yawk for a while, because other new and remarkable places swam into Brunhilda's ken — places called Hot Springs, Ark., and Pasadena, Cal., and Miami, Fla., and Rangeley Lakes, Me., in all of

which she garnered that experience of which mention has been made.

She was therefore a wise and travelled little girl — travelled as Gulliver — when they finally reached what turned out to be the last station in poor Mrs. Hatfield's unhappy journey through this world. Brunhilda by this time was a short, stocky, stubby person with a lisp, looking hardly half as old as she was, and of a rather shy and cold demeanor, except with her father, of whom she was very fond, though she liked pretty people as well as ever, and with all her affection could hardly believe him that. But there now came into Miss Hatfield's life the most overwhelmingly pretty person whom she, even in the wide extent of her wanderings, had ever encountered. The peerless creature was seated in their parlor at the "Brittany" in a perfectly unromantic manner, talking to Brunhilda's mother, just like anybody else, just as if she were not the only being of her kind on earth, one day when the young lady returned from a promenade. Precisely this sort of visit never having occurred before in Brunhilda's recollection, it would have interested her, even if she had not at once perceived that precisely this sort of visitor belonged to some different order and world from her own. The new lady, in no smallest particular, resembled the ladies of Miss Hatfield's previous acquaintance; she was not nearly so resplendently garbed, wearing, on the contrary, a black cloth suit and a white waist with a lawn cravat, and a black hat, all quite plain. She had a pale and delicately tinted face, and a great deal of black hair, and straight, heavy black brows and large eyes which looked at Brunhilda very kindly and smilingly. Also, she was thin and slender, with narrow hands and narrow little feet, and she spoke in a low voice. The little girl incontinently fell into an absurd state of unreasoning admiration and adoration; all the pictures and wonders she had seen, all the princesses

of the stage and of her fairy books, faded from her mind before this apparition. She cried vehemently when the stranger went away, thereby earning for herself a box on the ear and a fierce word or two from her mother. She chattered about the goddess to her nurse, to the bell-boy, to their waiter in the dining-room, to whomsoever she could get to listen at all times and seasons, excepting to her father in her mother's presence. Brunhilda refrained from *that*, after one trial.

"What's the lady's name, Mommer? — What's the lady's *name*?" she besieged her mother, until Mrs. Hatfield, after hushing her sharply two or three times, burst out: "Oh, my soul, Hilda, don't torment me! Why, her name's Dodsley — there, *now* are you satisfied?" She looked at her husband, whom she had not informed of the visit, with a strange mingling of defiance and wretched anxiety. "Yes, she was here to-day," she said, trembling with weak and groundless anger, as she saw his movement of interest.

"I don't mean *that*, I mean her *name*," said the child, conscious with the weird intuition of children that something was wrong, yet desperately persisting.

"You mean her front name, ain't that it, Kiddo?" said her father; "well, I know it — it's Letty."

"Letty! I'm going to call my dolly that. I think that's a be-yootiful name!" said Brunhilda, ecstatically. But why did her mother smack her roughly over the mouth — she, who had been doing no harm? And then why did her mother burst into wild, hysterical tears and wailings? What had happened? Her father got up and pushed back his chair with a savage movement. "Damnation, Ide!" — he began, and checked himself with a glance at Brunhilda, standing with wide eyes, hugging her lately christened dolly. He rang the bell furiously, and walked about the room biting his nails and scowling while her mother sobbed on the sofa with her hair in her eyes, until the maid appeared.

"Take the child out of the room — take Brunhilda away!" he growled; and Mrs. Hatfield reared herself up on her couch, distractedly coughing and choking, with red eyes and a very red nose.

"Yes, take the child away — do!" she cried out shrilly; "take her away, or she'll ask some more questions about *Letty*!" And she added a high-colored descriptive epithet such as Second Street ladies were wont to apply to one another in moments of emotion, years ago, in Mrs. Hatfield's youthful days. Brunhilda did not understand it; she only knew that her father looked terrible for a moment; and her mother began to whimper and scream alternately, and she herself was hustled off, without more words. But a lively remembrance of this domestic scene kept the child from ever again repeating the questions or speeches which she indistinctly realized had something to do with starting it, where her mother could hear her. And in fact it was no great while afterwards that Mrs. Hatfield was taken with some fresh manifestations of her disease, and went to the bed from which she scarcely rose again. She did not live to see finished the grand house, by the cost and size of which she had been made happier probably than by anything else that had happened to her during the whole of her sad and ugly and sickly life. Brunhilda, who was kept out of the way through the invalid's last weeks, and who, for that matter, cared little for her mother sick or well, was not nearly so much interested in the funeral as in the move which took place the following week, and in the vans full of astonishing furniture, the man from Tiffany's who came out to see Poppa about the decorations, and that big new automobile in which we recently met the young lady.

It took her some time to get used to the idea that they were to *live* in the Bishop's Place house, not merely to camp there for a brief while, and move on again. That the downstairs apartments, which were constructed

in a "period" style of unparalleled thoroughness and elegance, with an Italian Renaissance hall, Jacobean dining-room, Tudor library, Marie Antoinette *salon*, and so on, were as much her territory to play in and explore as the strictly "Colonial" upstairs, Brunhilda found it hard to believe. There was something a little pathetic in the fact that at first she sorely missed the marble offices and rotundas, the cloak- and check-rooms, the valises massed in corners with a porter standing guard over them, the cabs ranked at the sidewalk, the small café tables and huge numbered keys — all the countless accessories of the only life she knew. But this strangeness by and by wore away; there was so much to think about, besides. She had a pony and two dogs now, and a little black-nosed donkey with a cart — things she had never stayed long enough in one spot to accumulate heretofore. There was a croquet-ground where she played stirring games with her father, and later, as she grew to know them, with some of the neighboring children. In the fall she was to go to school where some of them went. The grounds and the great house were full of men in buttons and black-skirted, white-aproned young women whom Brunhilda did not suppose to be gentlemen and ladies, nor speak to with a "sir" or "ma'am" nowadays; she had discovered that they were servants, creatures of an inferior caste, and bullied them roundly on occasions. There was nobody to correct or restrain the little girl, nobody to oversee her training in manners. If she had not been in the main honest and good-natured, she would speedily have become intolerable, what with her father's indulgences, and the gossiping, lying, cringing, insolent underlings by whom she was surrounded. As it was, she was not, perhaps, much worse than other spoiled children in a land where unspoiled ones are the exception.

As the garden progressed, a string of greenhouses took

shape, and a pond at the bottom of a little dell (it was the old Gates Farm spring, in fact) where the gardener told Brunhilda there were to be water-lilies and flags and other aquatic marvels after a while; but it was still only half completed, and in some places a chaos of bare earth mounds and gravel, troughs of mortar, packing-boxes and sheaves of young plants or saplings done up in straw and burlaps, when, some of the slopes being at last sodded and the curving flights of white steps built, Brunhilda carried her explorations as far as the back fences of Charlotte Street. And there, one bright morning, she beheld the lady whom after all this while — more than a year — she had never forgot, and whose name the dolly of a third generation from the original still bore! The child viewed her with the same thrill as before; the lady's house, her yard, her sick man, everything about her, had an indefinable attraction for this small heroine. "I saw my Letty-lady!" she told her father that evening, excitedly, with shining eyes. The Letty-lady lived back of their garden across the fence; she had a sick man, and an old, *old* lady in her house. It was a little house — not like *ours*. Brunhilda had not spoken to her — she didn't exactly like to — she thought it might frighten the sick man, he got frightened awfully easy — but couldn't she go and see her some time?

"Well, not right now — I guess you'd better not go right now," her father said. And he pursued this temporizing policy until the meeting recorded in the last chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE ice having been broken at last, little Miss Hatfield, who had expanded lately into a personage of considerable readiness, tenacity, and decision of character, knowing surprisingly well what she liked and wanted, and not disposed to let any species of vegetation accumulate under her feet before getting it, began to cultivate the Dodsley family, as one might say, tooth and nail. "How do you do? I've come to see Jack," she announced, walking in with her arms laden with picture-books, building-blocks, a mouth harp, and a variety of other treasures, — all she could carry, in fact — the morning after they had triumphantly returned him to his home at the end of the automobile ride, tired, excited, and jubilantly loquacious. "I've come to play with Jack. I've brought some things because he said he didn't have any, and I'm going to teach him dominoes," said Brunhilda, with authority. "You don't mind, do you?" she added a little anxiously, turning up her homely small face to Letty's, in which, perhaps, she detected a certain indecision.

"Why — no — but —" said Letty, hesitating. It would entertain Jack — anything entertained him; and that would be a relief to herself. But she was uncertain how to tell Brunhilda, or whether, indeed, Brunhilda could be made to understand that her new friend was not a child of her own age with the slight difference of being miraculously developed in stature — "And I don't want to take advantage of the little thing, or make a convenience of her," Letty thought with a kind of spiritual recoil from that low expedient. "Why, yes," she said at length; "only you mustn't

get tired, you know. When you feel like going out and playing with the little boys and girls, you must go and leave him. Jack can't play with *them*, you know."

"Why? Because he's sick? Ain't he well enough yet?"

"Not yet," Letty told her; "and I don't want him to, anyhow."

All the laws of life and conduct laid down for them by their elders, and, alas, likely to be enforced by superior might if by no other means, seem to children so dull, baseless, unreasonably and illogically arbitrary, that Brunhilda heard this last pronouncement without comment or idea of opposition, as accustomed as she was to having her own way; it was of a piece with the rest of the senseless grown-up despotism against which argument was mere waste of time. Besides, she was not, in truth, particularly desirous to share Jack with the other children; already she felt the distinction of ownership. She was to be the only person privileged to play with Jack and take him automobile-riding. Very likely, too, the queer instinctive maternalism of little girls moved her; she knew obscurely that Jack's malady was a thing out of the way and mysterious and to be treated with a great discretion of which only a few people (like herself!) were capable. "I guess those children wouldn't be nice to him, anyhow," she said to Letty, confidentially; "*they* don't know how sick he is. But it won't hurt him a bit to play with *me*. And I told him I'd bring the dominoes, and you want to learn, don't you, Jack?"

"Yes, indeed," said Jack, pleased; "what do we do?"

Brunhilda got out the tools of her game, explaining briskly: "— And we'll take out the double-fives and double-sixes, because they're so hard to count, and you know they set you back an awful lot when you have 'em left over — you just can't *ever* win with 'em in," was her final dictum.

"All right," said Jack; and Letty, passing through the room a while later, saw them deep in their game with the double-fives and double-sixes left out, punctuated with squeals of excitement from Brunhilda, followed by Jack's obliging laugh.

"That's two — and six — that's — let's see — that's eight you've got, Jack, and that's a blank — that don't count anything, you know —"

"Well, hold on, I've got another — it's a two — isn't that a two?" Jack said.

"Well, if it isn't! Oh, *my!*"

"Is it nice, Jack? Are you having a good time?" Letty asked him, pausing by their table.

"Fine!" said Jack, enthusiastically. "But it would be nicer if you could come and play, too," he added quickly with his touching civility; and he got up. "Won't you sit here?"

"No, I'm busy now. Do you like it, Brunhilda?"

"Grand!" said Brunhilda, not less enthusiastic than the other. "Just think, he can't count any better than I can!" They both laughed; it was a delightful joke.

It would not have been strange if the little girl had very soon wearied of a companion so timorous, slow, irresponsible, and helpless as Jack must have proved; but Brunhilda probably liked him all the better for his dependence. Jack, moreover, obeyed her every word, equally good-tempered, awkward, and submissive, a thing most captivating to the feminine spirit. Her shrill little voice, issuing commands, or shrieking advice, warning, and reproof at him, was to be heard at all hours in the Dodsley back yard, and in the Hatfield grounds. Jack would swing her as long as she was minded; he trundled her up and down on the bicycle which she had recently acquired and was endeavoring at the cost of many bruises to ride, by the hour, smiling and perspiring and profuse in encouragement and ad-

miration ; at her instigation he got a hatchet and saw and some nails from one of the Hatfield carpenters and built a pen with stakes and poultry wire for her white rabbits ; he was not unskilful with his hands. He made a kite for her, and whittled out a boat which they sailed, with the family of wooden dolls from Brunhilda's Noah's Ark for passengers, on the not at all stormy waters of the Hatfield lily pond. On rainy days they played dominoes, or essayed melodies on the mouth harp with very doleful results ; but in bright weather all through this summer, Brunhilda would order out the automobile in splendid fashion, and they went for long rides with the not too well-pleased Antoine, until something happened which, as neither one of them could clearly explain it, was never quite understood by either Letty or the child's father ; the latter, however, found out enough to act with that promptness and vigor which appeared to characterize him.

The two came back from a longer ride than usual on a torrid day, both of them very much excited, frightened, and incoherent, with Antoine darkly scowling over the wheel. Questioned by Letty, Jack only cried and clung to her, and said that he had been afraid and — and — Antoine — and Brunhilda — and Antoine ; and he clenched his fists in pitiful anger at the mention of the chauffeur's name, and looked so wild that Letty got him to bed with soothing words, in some alarm. Brunhilda was a little more explicit, reciting the tale to her father. They had gone a long way — it was out in the country — not the real *country* country, you know, because there were some houses — she guessed they weren't very nice houses. And Antoine *would* go fast, though she told him not to — and he said he was going to stop at one of the houses, because it was so hot — and there were other automobiles outside it with men in them ; they had things to drink — bottles — and there were ladies, too — and she didn't know what

got the matter with Jack, but he got frightened, and he got mad at Antoine some way—she had never seen Jack get mad before—oh, yes, once, when he saw a man kick a dog—and he didn't seem to know what he was mad about. He trembled and cried, and said they must go home, and tried to say other things, and begged Brunhilda to stay with him, and not get out of the auto. Anyway, she wasn't going to get out; she was a little scared, too, you know—not much, just a little. And one of the men in one of the other machines said: "'Pipe his nutty nibs in the red buzz-wagon! Aw, give him a drink, somebody!'" And one of them came with a glass, and Jack knocked it out of his hand, and struck at him, and began to cry again. And they all laughed. And then Antoine came out of the house at last, and she told him to go straight home, and she was going to tell her Poppa, and he said, "You go to hel —"

"'S'nuff, Brunhilda," said the large Mr. Hatfield, when she reached this point in the narrative, putting her off his knee; and he rose with his brick-red countenance a trifle redder. He was about to descend to his garage, but changed his mind and called a servant and told her to send Antoine to him, with so formidable a voice and aspect that the young woman sped away in delighted terror; erelong the whole household was on tiptoe to behold the wretched Antoine going up to his doom. I do not envy the French gentleman this quarter of an hour. He departed shortly after, with his valise, leaving a curse just outside the stone gateposts: "*S-s-acrrre* peeg!" says Antoine, with a hiss; and he spat heartily, and shook his fist at the unoffending façade of the Hatfield residence. Brunhilda heard of his going with regret, having got over her scare by this time.

"What made Jack get so mad at Antoine, Poppa?" she asked.

Hatfield looked at her with an odd expression. "I don't know, Kiddo," he said; and again to himself, thoughtfully: "I don't know—poor devil—I—I mean poor *fellow*, you know, Hilda. I guess he just kind of knew that Antoine wasn't acting right—maybe he just kind of remembered from the time when he was—was well, you know." He sat down and took the child into his lap. "You see, Jack ain't like you and me, Brunhilda; you knew that, didn't you?"

She nodded, with a rather puzzled face, nevertheless.

"Well, then, Kiddo, it's—it's this way, I guess. He kind of remembered from way back when he *was* like you and me—"

"You mean he's kind of like a boy now, but he was a gentleman once, before he was sick?" queried the youngster, impressed.

"Well—yes—I suppose that's it. Man don't ever forget being a gentleman once, I guess," said Hatfield, with a return of the odd expression.

He went to call, after this untoward event, at the Dodsley house, apologizing somewhat confusedly, but with evident sincerity, for his chauffeur's behavior. Mr. Hatfield was not used to this sort of social exercise, though he acquitted himself well enough. "I've made up my mind not to have any more of these joy-riding dagos around," he said to Letty, with emphasis; "I can get hold of some decent American-born fellow, I guess. 'Tain't such a much running an auto, anyway—any smart boy could learn it." And he added, to Letty's profound surprise, "The kind of boy I used to be, back there on Second Street when we were kids, you know. I'd have picked it up right off—could now, for that matter, but I don't want to; I'd rather hire somebody."

At their brief casual meetings hitherto, Policy Jim had never referred to the old days; and to hear him

bring up the subject now without apparently a particle of embarrassment, startled Letty not a little. She could not, indeed, imagine him ashamed of the poverty and coarseness of his youth, nor, for that matter, ashamed of any part of his career, even were it as disreputable as had once been rumored. Letty vaguely felt that he was not that kind of a man; some quality of arrogance and resolution in him subdued her criticism now as it had subdued her at the age of eleven. Before she could speak, he asked directly: "You never go back there now, do you? To the old Muskingum Street house, I mean?"

"I haven't been there since I was married — over twelve years," Letty said.

"I don't, either. My folks are all dead or scattered, and I didn't like my father's second wife, anyhow. I went back once." He paused. Letty wondered if it was when he married "Ida" — poor dull, jealous "Ida," who was now lying out in Greenwood Cemetery with a high white shaft over her, similar to that which marked the resting-place of Bishop Sylvanus Breen, that valuable and venerable prelate, and honest good man — such is the equality of graves!

"Your father turned up, didn't he?" said Mr. Hatfield, with the same ruthless directness.

"Yes," said Letty, tranquilly. This inquiry from this particular source did not rouse her to the resentment which the mere notion of it would have inspired in her an hour before. What difference could the facts about her father make to a man like Jim Hatfield? she thought. He could remember perfectly other members of her family, and in the light of maturity he must realize what kind of people the Breens were. He must know—or could guess—everything there was to know about them, good and bad, as well as she did. And, as if to corroborate this judgment, his next words were:—

"I've met your uncle — I don't mean the one that lives here; I know him, too, of course — but the other, T. T. Breen."

"Uncle Tom? Is that so?"

"Yep. Met him at Sheepshead Bay in '93 or '4 — along there," said Mr. Hatfield. "In a business way, you know," he explained gratuitously; and a faint, unfathomable grin disturbed his hard features for an instant.

Letty, who had long entertained some reasonable doubts as to the solid and regular character of her Uncle Tom's affairs, heard her visitor's words and read his expression with mixed dismay, irritation, and, strange to say, amusement. After all, supposing he had been associated "in a business way" with her uncle, what difference did *that* make, either? He certainly was not going to publish their transactions from the housetops. She began to feel extraordinarily comfortable and intimate with Mr. Hatfield; he was probably no more of a scamp than her own father and uncle (Letty thought cynically) with the point in his favor of being a successful one! Perhaps the memory of their boy-and-girl companionship helped to undermine her habitual reserve; like other women, she would always keep a soft spot in some corner of her heart for her first lover, though it was little she had cared for him at the time.

"Well, I hope your husband won't be any the worse for it," said Hatfield, getting ready, it would seem, to take his leave; yet he lingered. "And say, I — I hope my little girl coming over here so much don't worry you. She thinks a lot of him — and of you, too. But you must send her off if she worries you."

"No, indeed — Brunhilda's a help to me — I'm only afraid of imposing on the little thing. She — she entertains Jack — keeps him interested, you know," Letty said quickly. She had no idea of enlisting any-

body's pity or sympathy, being far too proud and reticent; she was only anxious to do the child justice. But the man looked at her with a curious softening.

"I—I suppose there ain't any prospect—I mean, he'll be better some day, won't he?" he said, lowering his voice as we do, unreasonably enough, to speak of the dead. What was Jack but dead? In his coffin he would be no more so than at this moment.

"No," said Letty, with her drilled and effortless calm. "Something's gone, you know. The doctors all say it's hopeless. They told me just what he'd be like; and it's all come true—turned out just as they said it would. So I believe them."

She spoke evenly, without tremor. Hatfield had no words adequate to the situation. "Well, that's—that's pretty bad!" he murmured lamely, looking down. Then he asked another question, but this time with hesitation, and, it was evident, on a genuinely kindly impulse. "Look here," he said, "it's none of my business, and maybe I hadn't ought to say a word about it, but—what are you going to *do*? How do you—how are you going to—to make out—I mean your living, you know—coal and—and house-rent and—you know what I mean? Brunhilda's told me one or two things—the kid don't mean any harm, you understand; she can't help talking about what she sees—and I ain't just what you'd call blind myself, for that matter. I guess I ought to know what doctors' bills and sickness cost by this time; and your husband's trouble—" he made a gesture of defeat and helplessness. "It would pretty nearly break *anybody* up! What are you going to *do*?"

Letty was not offended; it would have been stupid to have taken offence, according to her notions. She answered the question as plainly as it was asked. "Why, I think we can get along, Mr. Hatfield. The Riggins Estate—"

"Yes, they ought to give you something. They do, don't they?"

"Yes. They —" she could not bring herself to say "Mr. Gates." "They paid my husband's full salary for months. Then I told them I couldn't take that any more, as soon as I found out he wouldn't ever be able to work for them again —" she looked at him almost appealingly, wondering if he understood — if he could possibly understand. But Hatfield nodded with an air of comprehension, his eyes studying her face. The fact that he himself was — or had been credibly reported at any rate — a rascal, apparently did not prevent him from recognizing honesty when he met with it!

"You thought it wouldn't be square. Well?"

"They insisted on giving him something, anyhow — a kind of pension, you know, because he'd been with them so long — twenty years. It's very liberal — they're very kind," said Letty, with some eagerness to render his due unto Cæsar. It had not been easy for her pride to accept this settlement; but she at least saw that it was the part of common-sense.

Mr. Hatfield grunted. "Hungh!" he remarked thoughtfully; and then as he kept his attitude of inquiry, Letty continued with some inward amazement at her own relief and satisfaction in these confidences. "Of course I'll have to do something. I've got it all planned out —" she stopped, overtaken by a sudden shyness, reddening brightly as she faced him. "I'm going to start a lingerie shop," said Letty, gamely.

"A *whateree* shop?"

Letty explained, finding herself talking to him with more and more freedom as she went on. It would have been absurd to call Mr. Hatfield sympathetic; so delicate a feeling could hardly be associated with any one of his tough construction. But he was the only person so far who had shown an intelligent interest in this

feature of her affairs. Letty had never made an intimate woman friend; Jack's poor old grandmother was of no more real help than Jack himself; her Uncle William disapproved, when she timidly unfolded her plan to him, and, to Letty's mingled vexation and distress, insisted on increasing by five dollars the sum he contributed monthly to her support. "I guess that'll help you along without your trying to run any shop, Letty," he said, overriding her protests with a kindness which Letty felt to be positively maddening. She would rather scrub floors, she told herself despairingly, than take him into her confidence again. "I want to work decently for my living, as thousands of women do — and Uncle Will thinks I'm hinting at him for more money!" she thought with tears. "Well, I suppose it would be natural enough in our family!" No such ideas, however, would be likely to come into the head of Policy Jim; he listened to her, perhaps not exactly as he would have listened to another man, but with something of the forbearing curiosity with which he might have heard an enterprising boy — a "smart" boy. Letty was glad of the counsel of her ancient playmate, extremely rough diamond though he might be.

"I can sew and embroider beautifully, you know," she finished. "And there's a great rage for hand-work — shirtwaists and underneath things and table-linen. I *know* I can do it. I thought I'd have a little sale here at the house to get started. Of course I can't afford to have a real shop or anybody to help me — not at first, anyhow. And, besides, I have to stay at home on account of Jack. That's the reason I couldn't go out for any kind of office work."

"Oh, no, you couldn't do *that* — I see," Hatfield assented instantly. He considered a little. "Well, I don't know why you shouldn't make a go of it," he said at last; "say, there's one thing: you ought to ask

top-notch prices. Don't be scared. Stick it to 'em. It's mostly women with money that are going to buy of you, anyhow. Be a good thing if you could work up a trade with our Hebrew friends; Jews like to spend and to have their friends see 'em spend, and the women dress out of sight. Sol wants to have Rachel and Alma and Cora and the rest of the bunch all diked out in diamond necklaces and peek-a-boos — it kind of makes him feel good when he thinks of all that time he put in selling pants at ninety-nine cents a leg, seats free, for Borowski and Sokup down on Water Street. And say," pursued Mr. Hatfield, warming to his subject, "you ought to send out these little fancy cards like the New York tailors do, and these swell milliners and dressmakers that go 'round to all the big hotels all over the country."

"Well, I don't know — I wasn't thinking of doing anything on a large scale —" began Letty, rather taken aback. But Hatfield brushed aside her doubts and objections.

"That ain't a large scale," he said, amused. "You've got to get yourself noticed — you've got to advertise nowadays, or you ain't anywhere. You've got to get your name up. It oughtn't to be much of a trick here, where you're known already; you're in with the society set, anyhow. That'll be dollars in your pocket —"

"Well, but, Mr. Hatfield, I — I don't want to make money out of *that* — out of people I *know* —" stammered Letty, appalled.

"Who are you going to make it out of, then?" he said with a laugh. "Look here, I'll give you an order to start with. I'll give you an order for Brunhilda's things. You know what she needs a lot better than I do. I'll bet I get stung every time I go into one of these women's stores; you can dicker with 'em easier and save me the trouble, and make a little for yourself on the side." And, seeing hesitation in her face, he

went on : "If you want money right now, I'll stake you. Why, what you kicking 'bout? Lots of people got to be staked by somebody when they go into business — nine men out of ten. 'Tain't anything; it's done every day. You see I believe you'll make good. If I didn't, you couldn't get a thing out of me. I haven't got any use for anybody that don't make good," said Mr. Hatfield, frankly.

CHAPTER IV

LETTY did not realize that she had actually embarked on her experiment until there came the following morning in the first mail a letter with a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, both engrossed in a huge, black, sprawling, vigorous hand, wherein Mr. Hatfield reiterated his assurances and advice of the night before. Letty looked at the yellow paper revenue envelope with the pink-and-white embossed stamp in the corner, in which this missive arrived with something like a laugh; it did not much resemble certain other notes she used to receive—fastidious little notes Gates's man had brought around. She seldom thought of those days now; when she did, it was with a wondering contempt at her own conduct. She did not regard herself as a bad woman, merely as an abnormally silly one—"and with all my sense, too! What possessed me?" she sometimes mused. Hatfield's letter, however, brought before her the fact which had been lurking unpleasantly somewhere in the back of her mind all the while that for a woman, no matter who she is, to take money from a man is a proceeding most people want to have very clearly explained, and about which the world is not always charitable in its comment. Letty revolved this as she went down to the bank; and, knowing the officials of that institution quite well, she remarked, as she gathered up the bills pushed towards her under the paying-teller's little gilt grating, "I'm in business now, did you know it, Mr. Hudson?"

Mr. Hudson, who had inspected the name on the check and counted out the money, as if it were the most natural transaction in the world, looked interested.

"I'm making fine needlework," said Letty, choosing

her words with reference to the masculine intelligence; "fine white sewing and embroidery for baby clothes and trousseaux and children's outfits complete. I'm going to send a card to Mrs. Hudson when I have my sale."

"Well, that's fine!" said the clerk, heartily. "I hope you'll succeed, Mrs. Dodsley."

"Why, I've just finished an order for Mr. Hatfield — for his little girl, you know," Letty said smoothly; "that's not so bad for a start, is it?"

"First-rate," said Mr. Hudson; and noting the amount of Hatfield's check — "Wow!" he ejaculated inwardly; "well, Hatfield's got nothing but! He can stand it if anybody can!" He repeated the tale to his wife at the dinner-table that evening. "Gracious, I'd like to know just what she made for that — and do you suppose she supplies the materials?" the lady inquired with a very disquieting interest. Perhaps Mrs. Dodsley had done a stroke of advertising without intending it!

As for that business-woman, she walked away from the bank thinking: "Well, I'm *going* to make the things for Brunhilda — it's the same thing. This sounded better, that's all!" And on reaching home, she called the youngster in from the yard and took her small measurements in a panic-struck hurry, feeling that the clothes couldn't be made quick enough.

With all its hard circumstances, it may be doubted if this was not the happiest part of Letty Breen's life hitherto. She was driven with work, which it was a kind of religion with her to do to perfection; she was up early and late at a dozen tasks besides her stitching; she had to count every penny, consider every yard of goods, calculate to the last needleful of thread. She did it all unflinching, untiringly, with a spirit, a courage, and industry that many a finer-natured woman might

have lacked. For one thing Mrs. Letty, whatever her trials of mind and body, did not suffer the torturing anxieties and regrets and desperate futile hopes of a loving wife, although, strange to say, she probably felt more tenderly towards Jack now in his affliction and dependence than she ever had before. She never cast back wretchedly to the time when her husband was in full health and strength — Letty herself had always been by far the stronger, and knew it; her consistent and impartial humanity had made their home happy in those days, and governed all her relations with him now. "Never speaks sharp to him, or gets mad with anything he does — patient as the day is long, she is — and 'tain't so easy, times, either, lemme tell you!" she overheard her servant reporting to the one next door, and smiled dryly. The elder Mrs. Dodsley went about spreading the same kind of encomiums broadcast, more than ever convinced that her grandson's wife was fit to be numbered with the saints. "She works herself to the bone, and never says a word about it, and keeps just as cheerful and smiling as if she liked it . . . kindness itself to poor Jack, you can see how she loves him, . . ." etc. Fragments of this nature, ascending to Letty's ears, as she sat upstairs over her needle, mingled with sympathetically admiring murmurs from some visitors, caused her to smile again. She did not give herself much credit for magnanimity or self-sacrifice. "Why, what should I be but kind to Jack?" she used to think; "could any one be unkind to him and keep a rag of self-respect? What has love to do with it? And as to work, I *do* like it. There's nothing to pull such a long face over, anyhow; work never hurt anybody yet. Work's something you don't want to do. If I had to go out for a nursery-maid, I'd call *that* work." She thought of her mother with a quick sigh. "She *worked*. I suppose I'm a little like her — I hope so — not *all* Breen, anyway!

There are legacies and legacies. Pshaw, Letty Dodsley, you don't believe in that, and you know it. Let every tub stand on its own bottom!" she concluded with a laugh; and she was humming a gay little tune as Mrs. David came up the stairs.

In the meanwhile, as was perhaps unavoidable, she saw a good deal, off and on, of Mr. James Hatfield. This gentleman expressed himself in the handsomest terms regarding his little girl's wardrobe, when it was completed and sent to the house, — a profuse and bewildering display of fine edging, intricate and accurate tailoring, sheer muslins, ribbons, and tinted tissue-paper. Miss Brunhilda went daily to kindergarten that fall, arrayed with an elegance, taste, and style that — "made 'em sit up, judging by what the kidlet says," her father told Letty, grinning. "Two or three ladies where she goes to play with their little girls, you know, have asked her who made her dresses. One of 'em called me up the other day —" and here Mr. Hatfield mimicked a high and mincing feminine voice, in a manner astonishing and rather amusing to witness. "'Ting-a-ling! Hello! I want to speak to Mr. Hatfield, please. Oh, is that you, Mr. Hatfield? This is Mrs. Stepandfetchit —' I can't remember her name, and it's no difference, anyhow — 'Mr. Hatfield, I want to ask where you have your little girl's clothes made. They're the cutest things I ever saw! I mean those gingham dresses and those —' Let's see — what'd she call 'em, now? Kind of overhauls with a waist underneath, y'know? — 'Ma'am,' says I, 'I give you my word I don't know a gingham dress nor those other doodaddles from Adam's off ox — all dresses look alike to me,' says I, 'but I'm glad you say they're pretty, and if you want to know who made 'em, why' — and then I gave her your name and address."

"Maybe I know her. I wonder who it is," said Letty, alertly.

"Oh, yes, she said she knew you. I — I didn't talk you up, you know," Hatfield said, picking up her scissors that lay on the table and examining them intently; "because that — that don't ever do much good, somehow." He looked carefully away from her, out of the window. "It wouldn't be any particular use for *me* to talk you up with the ladies, you know. I just said I was mighty pleased that *she* approved of the clothes, and I'd take it as a kindness if she or any lady would tell me whether my little girl looked all right or not, because a man can't know. That wasn't all guff, either," he interrupted himself, facing Letty now quite openly; "I *do* want people — women folks, I mean — to take an interest in her."

Letty did not answer for a moment. She was sitting lost in wonder at the unexpected depths of diplomatic insight this Orson had just revealed. Of course it would be wisest for him not to "talk her up"; but where or from whom had this graduate of the slums learned that caution? Certainly not from the experiences of his hard, pushing, reckless, callous, unscrupulous career; certainly not from that poor, silly, loud-mouthed creature, his wife. Plainly it was no motive of native delicacy that restrained him; it was nothing but a piece of policy in his view. Policy Jim! thought Letty, with an inward smile.

At other times as their acquaintance, so surprisingly renewed, progressed, Hatfield, led on either by that manner of sympathetic understanding which the companionable Mrs. Letty knew so well how to assume, or by the natural masculine tendency which perhaps he had not had much chance to indulge of late, discoursed to her of himself and his achievements and his aspirations with amazing freedom. He recalled most powerfully to Letty the boy of twenty years ago with his boastful arrogance, his real force, his grimy experience of life, his strange sordid idealism. "I made up my

mind I'd have a hundred thousand dollars by the time I was twenty-five," he told her in one of these confidences; "I made up my mind to that when I run away from home, when I wasn't but fourteen years old. 'I won't ever go back 'less'n I've got that much, and I'm going back when I'm twenty-five,' I said to myself. And I did it."

Mr. Hatfield never went into the details of how he "did it," nor of how he acquired the succeeding hundred thousands. Possibly it was by processes Letty could not have understood, had he been ever so communicative; for that matter, he might have safely told her that he had looted a bank or blown open some millionaire's strong-box, it would have made no change in her friendly attitude, nor in her real feeling of friendship for him. Letty's father was a thief and a weakling, and she despised him properly for being both; but a woman has a different and separate standard of honor for every man she knows! As it was, Hatfield appeared most anxious to impress her with the fact that he had definitely retired from business, meaning henceforward to occupy himself only with attending to the property he had already accumulated.

"I'd have stayed in the game, likely, if Brunhilda had been a boy," he said to her; "you count on your son being able to take care of himself whether you leave him ten dollars or ten million — at least I'll bet any boy of mine could! — so you don't care so much about piling it up for him; you'd just as lief take chances on it, and keep on. And he'd have been in it with me, anyhow. But with girls it's different; they've got to be provided for. You feel as if you wanted to make sure of that, before everything else. Say you died sudden — anybody's likely to — and left things kind of hung up, hey? Who's going to look out for your girl? Why, nobody. No, sir, when Brunhilda come, I made up my mind how much would do me,

and then I'd quit. Thing is to know when you've got enough. It's hard quitting," he added with a tinge of regret; "but it's safe. You keep your health, you sleep a lot better nights, and if you've got any sense, you can have just as much fun with what you've got as if it was twice as much — and a deal more than if you'd lost it all and got to begin over again!"

Letty, as she sat working the elegant monogram on Mrs. Gwynne Peters's tablecloth, and listening to these remarks in a kind of responsive silence — she never interrupted — hardly knew what comment to make, for all her cautious tactfulness. "Brunhilda's going to have a very happy life, I'm sure," she ventured at last.

"She will, if money can do it — and there's mighty few things money can't do," Hatfield said, announcing his dingy creed unabashed, even complacently. "That's another thing about girls: they've got to have a *home* — they've got to *belong* somewhere. They'd ought to have — well — dancing school and — and French — and — and those sort of society frills, you know —" he wagged a hand vaguely in the air, looking to her for comprehension; and seeing it in her face, went on: "They've got to be *brought up* — and not in any Second Street way, either," said Brunhilda's father, smiling rather grimly. "Right from the start I meant Brunhilda should have a home — a tony one — the right sort, you know. First off, I thought of N'York, but N'York kind of oversized me. Better be in some smaller place — a city, of course, but more the size of this one. She can be *somebody* here on what wouldn't be a drop in the bucket for N'York."

The woman to whom he spoke was curiously touched by these revelations of plebeian hope and endeavor; she thought he was simple and pathetic in spite of all his hardness and his knowledge of the world, this vulgarian with his poor, tawdry dreams of social advancement for his child. The most honest and honorable

man on earth could not have shown a more self-effacing devotion. For it was plain that his present way of life offered nothing of especial interest to himself. He had none of the tastes of leisure and was probably bored unutterably by it. He had to hire people to decorate and furnish the costly gilt barn he miscalled "home"; he never opened a book in his life; a tea-store chromo was the same to him as the finest painting of the greatest master that ever lived; a performance of grand opera would send him sound asleep and snoring. Notwithstanding the mighty few things that money could not do, what had it done for him? And what would it do for the daughter in whose future he was so absorbed? It gave Letty a pang to think that when Brunhilda grew up, she would very likely be ashamed of her father, ashamed of the way he talked, the way he thought, the way he ate and drank; she would patronize him in public and scold him in private, and strain every nerve to keep him in the background at all times. What else could his "society frills" teach her? It was grotesque and sad.

Mr. Hatfield, in his self-imposed idleness, became so interested in Letty's venture, wherein, to be sure, he himself had some slight stake, that young Mrs. Dodsley felt a little alarm lest on the day of her first sale, he would want to call the public attention by a brass band or a brigade of sandwich men patrolling the streets, in accordance with his views on that point. But Policy Jim suggested nothing of the sort; and when, in a jocular spirit, she sent him one of her cards, expressed his approbation of its sedately fashionable appearance in grave and considered terms.

"That's the way it ought to be — no gingerbread and no flourishes. Just plain and businesslike in a kind of a stylish way," he said; and looking sharply at her — "What you so surprised at?" asked Mr. Hatfield, with a most disconcerting shrewdness; "you

thought I wouldn't know anything about it, hey?" He burst out laughing at the sight of Letty's discomfiture. She laughed herself; she was very good-natured.

He was, moreover, entirely too shrewd to take her invitation seriously, even insisting on Brunhilda's staying away from Charlotte Street that day, to that young lady's loudly announced disapproval. "No, I don't think you'd better go and hang around and bother your Letty-lady to-day, Kiddo," he said inflexibly; "tell you what, you come and have a ride with Pop in the auto. We'll go out to the Country Club and get some nice lemonade made with fizzy water, and watch 'em play golf."

"Hoo! They don't play golf when it's as cold as this," said Brunhilda, rudely. Nevertheless she obeyed the big man, though it was so seldom he exacted obedience.

There was a tolerable attendance at the sale. Letty afterwards, in one of those conversations she sometimes held with herself, which she had the habit of conducting with a bitter plain speaking, pointed out that there would probably be more customers the next time, because people would have found out by this experience that they did not have to go through the painful, or to some of them annoying, ordeal of seeing Mr. Dodsley. "They must naturally have been afraid of that," Letty reflected. Jack had been very quiet and good, however, shut up in the little back bedroom, with an occasional visit from Letty to cheer and encourage him; no stranger would have suspected his existence, particularly since almost everybody carefully avoided mentioning him. It was not so easy to manage Mrs. David. The old lady, who was pitifully anxious to do her share towards keeping the pot boiling, had pestered Letty ceaselessly all these days and months with attempts at fancywork impossible for her age and eyesight, and trembling old knotted hands to accomplish. Baby-

socks, mittens, sacques which she tried in vain to knit, producing wierdly-aborted garments at which Letty kind-heartedly forbore to laugh — “crazy-quilts” and sofa-cushions pieced together out of scraps of silk in the fashion of thirty years back — china candlesticks decorated with decalcomanie pictures (resurrected from what garret or antique trunk !) in a fashion older still — there was no end to her hopeless devices.

“I’m only going to have wash things made out of linen or cotton — only things to wear, or to use in the house, you know, Grandma,” Letty explained to her over and over again with an unimaginable patience. “It’s not like a church fair, you know.” And she finally persuaded old Mrs. Dodsley, who was in a touching state of despondency over her failures, to take up the comparatively simple industry of crocheting wash-cloths. In the way of suggestions, this was a ten-strike — a bonanza! Mrs. David crocheted happily morning, noon, and night; never in the history of the trade was such a supply of crocheted wash-cloths poured upon the market. She made them with pink and blue scalloped borders and put them up in packages of half a dozen, tied with ribbons of corresponding colors; she got a pencil and paper and calculated the cost of these articles — so much for crochet-cotton — for crochet-hook — for her own labor — she had it all down in her cramped, shaking figures. “Fifteen cents apiece — I don’t think that’s too much to ask for them, do you, Letty? All hand work, and they’ll last forever, you know.”

One of Letty’s customers was Mrs. William Breen, who, for her part, was not in the least afraid of seeing Jack, asked after him with the utmost interest, and had indeed, throughout Letty’s trials, shown the kindest and warmest of hearts and a genuine, if somewhat ill-directed, desire to help her. At the sale Mrs. Tump made up in energy for what she lacked of discretion,

pervading the rooms, fingering, pricing, and exclaiming over everything, so that she gave the impression of a crowd by her single presence; and saw others buy with such a delightful childlike zest that the fact that she bought nothing herself became, as it were, of no consequence. "I just *can't*, Letty," she said privately, with honest regret; "your things are lovely, but I can't do it, you know — ten dollars for that embroidered waist — and it's not made up — I just can't afford it. But I'm sure your prices are all right for anybody that's got the money, and I just hope you'll sell out everything, smick, smack, smooth! How much are those wash-rags? Fifteen cents? Mercy, why, you can get splendid Turkish towelling ones at all the stores for five! Well, never mind, I'm not going to come to your sale and go away without buying a thing. Give me one of those half-dozen bundles."

When everybody was gone at last in the cold twilight of late afternoon, — it was March, but wintry still, — Letty sat down with her own pencil and paper to her own accounts. Jack came timidly out, and asked her if he might go and get an *Evening Post*, and she gave him the two pennies from the little heap of change beside her. There were some bills, too, but not everybody had paid — and, alas, not everything had sold according to Mrs. Tump Breen's good-hearted wishes. Letty had expected that, though, and merely took notes with a philosopher's abstraction as her eyes wandered over the disordered room of what had made the best showing — the next best — the poorest. Chemises, laundry-bags, Irish-lace collars, initialled pillow-cases — "I shan't try those elaborate aprons again — it isn't worth while," she mentally decided; and reviewing her memoranda, wondered with her small satirical smile whether people bought shoe-bags because they really needed shoe-bags, or because shoe-bags were only two dollars and a half? She had orders for about

sixty-five dollars' worth of work, and had taken in ninety-odd — "If they all pay me," thought Letty, with a justifiable scepticism; she knew the habit of certain of her sex. She herself could not pay Hatfield; she counted up the advances he had made with a sinking heart. She could pay him something on account — if he would take it. It gave Letty no relief, it humiliated her to the last recess of her soul to know that Policy Jim did not want to be paid — that he would like to give her more — that his talk of business was the baldest of pretences, and his interest anything but businesslike. Her face flamed as she sat in the growing dark. "I oughtn't to have taken it from him in the first place," she thought wretchedly; "but, then, what was I to do? Anyway, I won't take any more. I'll pay him somehow. I'll do better with my next sale. At least, I won't let him know that *I* know!" What she meant by the last enigmatic resolve, perhaps Mrs. Letty would not have acknowledged in plain language to herself.

Mrs. David came in, looking about anxiously. "Did — did my wash-cloths sell, Letty?" she wanted to know in a worried voice; "there was so much confusion and talking while they were all here, and everybody wanted everything done at once, I didn't have time to notice, and of course I didn't want to call anybody's attention to my own things, and make people think I was anxious for them to buy them. Were they sold?"

"Yes, I think so. I was just making out a list of what we sold," Letty answered her absent-mindedly. Jack came back, banging the door in a rush of cold air, and hanging up his hat with his hasty movements so familiar and natural that sometimes for a fleeting half second Letty forgot there was anything wrong with him.

"It's dark outside," he said, coming into the fire and the lamplight gladly and a little tremulously; "I ran all the way from the corner. But I got the

paper —" he put it into her hands triumphantly; "look, there's a picture of some man on the outside."

There was, to be sure, a picture of somebody on the outside — a very large, glaring, staring picture, with correspondingly emphatic head-lines across the whole width of the two columns underneath: "PROMINENT FELLOW-TOWNSMAN DIES SUDDENLY IN CAIRO, EGYPT. CONNOISSEUR, CLUB-MAN, CAPITALIST, AND GLOBE-TROTTER SUCCUMBS TO HEART TROUBLE AT SHEP-HEARD'S HOTEL." Letty looked at it mechanically, indifferently; the evening papers were forever screeching about something, she thought, and she had even read the name twice before she recognized it.

"Your hand's cold, Letty," said Jack, cuddling it between his own. "Draw some more, will you?"

"Don't touch the writing pad, dear, I've been making figures — I wasn't drawing," Letty warned him in a voice that seemed to her to come from some one else; and Jack obediently let the thing be.

"There's bad news in the paper, Grandma," said Letty, gathering herself together; and as the old lady who was still searching the piles of needle work, looked up, only half-comprehending, Letty repeated with some idea of preparing her for the shock; "there's bad news. Mr. Gates is dead."

"Who?" said Mrs. Dodsley, with a blank face. Her mind did not work quickly this last year or so.

"Mr. Gates — Mr. Webster Gates."

"My goodness!" said Mrs. Dodsley, inadequately. It seemed as if she had not yet understood; but in another moment, she began to ask questions excitedly.

"Where was it? What was the matter with him? Was he sick long? Are they going to bring him home to be buried? Webster Gates! Well, of all things! Does it say who'll get his property? What a pity he never married and had a family! Do read about it, Letty."

Letty held the newspaper out to her. "No, no, you

read it. I'm — I'm too tired," she said, and sat down by the table; indeed she did feel tired. Jack took hold of her hand again and played with it happily during the reading which gave him no concern; and Mrs. Dodsley with her ancient spectacles conscientiously labored up and down the columns, anxious for the least detail.

"The many friends of Mr. D. W. Gates were shocked to learn by cable this afternoon of his sudden death in the city of Cairo, Egypt, where he had gone to spend the winter season after having passed the last year in England and on the Continent. . . . Although not in robust health, his ailment was not considered serious, and the end comes as an appalling surprise. . . . Great regret expressed. . . . No definite information obtainable, the offices of the Riggins Estate having been closed at three o'clock, as soon as the cable was received. Representatives of the *Post* and other papers, calling at the residence of Mr. Henry C. Boyle, for many years manager of Mr. Gates's affairs, were denied admittance. . . ."

"And here's a kind of biography of him — that picture doesn't look much like, it's too young — it must have been taken twenty years ago," said Mrs. Dodsley, scanning it critically. In fact, it was about that long out of date; Gates was boarding with her when it was taken. Maria used to think in those days that there never had been a finer young man — so appreciative of Jack — so considerate of herself — no wonder he had so many friends — she herself thought a great deal of Mr. Gates! "The deceased was born in Buffalo, New York State, in 1854, the son of George W. Gates, a well-known attorney of that city, and Emma Louise Breen, a sister of the late eminent Bishop Bre —' Mercy, that's a mistake! She was a Riggins — the Breens came in through her sister Charlotte. They ought to have asked you about that, Letty, *you* could

have told them. ' . . . Graduated from Harvard 1876. . . . European travel. . . . Returned and engaged in business 1878. . . . Mr. Gates was a member of the Capitol City Club, Country Club, Pen-and-Brush, Wyandotte, etc. . . . '

Letty listened without hearing ; although Gates had passed out of her life, as she knew, that June afternoon when he saw Jack for the first and last time, as completely as if he had died then and there, she found it hard to believe that he had passed out of everybody's life — hard and painful. She put a lock of hair back from her forehead, and suddenly remembered with a sharp pang having heard him say that he loved that gesture.

"Poor fellow ! He had everything in the world to live for !" said Mrs. Dodsley, putting down the paper. She went over to the lounge and fumbled again amongst the "lingerie" articles stacked thereon. "Oh, Letty, they're all here — every one of them — there wasn't one sold !" she cried out tragically, and turned around, her hands full of pink and blue beribboned parcels. "There wasn't one sold !" said poor old Maria, in a breaking voice ; "and they're so nice — I don't see *why* —"

Letty roused herself, putting aside her own sufficiently dreary reflections at sight of the other's distress. "Why, yes, they were sold, Grandma — they were all sold to — to Mrs. William Breen and lots of the others. Only they didn't take them away ; they're going to send for them, you know," she said, uttering this piece of invention readily with a manner that would have convinced the doubting Thomas himself ; and seeing the pathetically trembling face brighten at this news — "Yes, they were all sold — you must have made over five dollars. Mercy, don't mislay any of them ! You'd have to make a whole new set," said Letty, and whisked them out of sight ; and hid them afterwards on a remote shelf.

CHAPTER V

IF the younger Mrs. Dodsley did not sleep so very well that night when Mr. Webster Gates's death was reported all over town, and if for some days, or it might even be as much as a fortnight thereafter, she went about with rather a heavy heart and a sense of weariness and regret, she kept these facts strictly to herself with characteristic reticence. Being a busy, hard-working woman she was almost always able to turn her mind from despondent exercises of this sort, which generally require abundant leisure and the contemplative mood. And, for that matter, Mrs. Letty at her present age of thirty-four or so, had learned like the rest of us to put a good deal behind her and to close many doors. Her public, remembering it, had heard that she and Mr. Gates were nearly related and always great friends, spoke to her of him with a sympathetic consideration which she received with a perfect propriety and dignity. Very sad — so dreadfully sudden — and he was such a charming man !

That last might well have been Gates's epitaph, it was so universally used in comment on him. He had not been, perhaps, a person of notable force ; his inherited fortune, and his dilettante tastes and his frequent prolonged idlenesses were out of place in the American man's world. Now he was gone, the kind, free-handed, self-indulgent, easy-going gentleman ; and in a space of time so brief that he himself, in the amiable irony of his temperament would have noted it with amusement, he was forgotten. There was a funeral after four or five weeks to which everybody went ; and came away remarking how much older and how feeble

poor old Mr. Boyle was beginning to look ; he had felt very badly — all broken up, the other men in the office said, when the news came. Archer Lewis was one of the pall-bearers, and told his wife of what little conversation he had had with the old gentleman before and after the services. "I guess it was a hard blow to him — nice old fellow, Mr. Boyle. It was queer to hear him talk about 'Danny' — we never called him that, you know. No, he said Web wasn't in bad health at all when he went away — just a little out of sorts and thought he needed a change. He never could stand this climate more than two years or so at a stretch."

"He could have stood it, if he hadn't had twenty-five thousand a year," interjected Mrs. Kitty with her usual acumen ; "people don't need changes of climate when they can't afford to travel. What was the matter with him, anyhow ?"

"*You* don't know how much money he had, Kit," said her husband, remonstrating ; "those things are always exaggerated. Why, he had some kind of trouble with his heart — valvular or something ; it didn't always act right. Of course smoking didn't do him any good, and he *would* smoke. It began when he was a young fellow at college, and then after a few years I believe it kind of healed up, or stopped bothering him, anyhow. But he never could have been really *well* of it. He never liked to be talked to about it, so I hardly ever asked. But at fifty-one or two a man often breaks up — I mean when he's got some kind of organic trouble," said Archer, who was a pretty stout specimen himself, suddenly recollecting that his own fiftieth birthday was in sight.

"If he hasn't led the right kind of life," said his wife, in a knowing style ; "they always said Webster Gates wasn't any too good when he was a young fellow —"

"Well, he's dead now, anyhow," Lewis interrupted. And he added with something like a sigh; "I always liked him — always liked him."

"Yes, he was a charming man!" For her part, Mrs. Lewis had no slightest objection to Mr. Gates on the score of an ill-spent youth — quite the contrary! She rather liked him for it. "I heard he didn't leave any will," she said; "did Mr. Boyle say anything about that, Arch? Well, I suppose he wouldn't have much chance at the funeral. But who will get all that big property, if he didn't? Didn't make any will, I mean?"

"Next of kin," said Mr. Lewis, rather gruffly, so that his wife was silenced; and Archer looked over the paper and read the market reports and the court news, and swallowed the last of his coffee, and went down town to his office without giving much more thought to this sad business. The pitchers must keep on going to the well, no matter if they do get broken one after one.

The house out on East Broad Street stood with the front windows boarded up and the grass and weeds growing rankly in the yard, thus importing an air of gloom to the whole of that fashionable locality, for a long time. The servants whom Gates had left in charge had their own way within doors and about the back premises, to the scandal of all good housekeepers, although I daresay they were a respectable enough set of people, until the arrival of a number of the Riggins connection — who had already appeared once in considerable force at the funeral — turned everything upside down. No will had been found; Mr. Boyle was appointed administrator; the place must be sold and divided up by order of the court. And there now occurred that scatterment of the pictures and other treasures of the house, to which I believe this history has elsewhere referred. Mrs. Baldwin Riggins of Hartford, Connecticut — a daughter-in-law of the old lady

Carberry Riggins who herself was dead this fifteen years — unofficially took charge; Mrs. Jacob Bailey — she was one of the Buffalo Rigginses — came down from Chicago; the servants incontinently cleared out, or were cleared out, bag and baggage. Gates's manservant applied for and secured another butler's job with James Hatfield, Esquire; and people who ought to know pretended to remark a great improvement in the government and personnel of the Hatfield household immediately after it acquired the services of this experienced gentleman — even a change for the better in Policy Jim's own dress and deportment! If I am not mistaken, it was the butler who suggested Mr. Hatfield's purchase of the Gates wines which he must have had ample opportunity to test. "Them Riggins ladies and I'm told the whole family, sir, is strick temperance," he pointed out respectfully; "so you'd ought to buy 'em in dirt cheap." And in fact, although the family — they all had plenty of money — bid in a great deal of the house furnishings such as silver, tableware, etc., and some of the books and rugs, the only other competitor for the wine-cellar was Mr. Burke, representing the house committee of the Capitol City Club and he retreated early, leaving the wines to Mr. Hatfield at a very moderate figure.

It was about this time that Mrs. John Dodsley ("Lingerie, Hand-worked House-Linen, Infants' Outfits, Bridal Trousseaux, etc."), who was preparing for her autumn exhibit, and had just executed a very pretty order for a bed-and-bureau set, in a floral design for Miss Lizzie Boyle — Mrs. Dodsley, I say, received a call from her latest customer's father, that is, old Mr. Boyle himself; and he did, indeed, look quite old and grave as he came up Charlotte Street, and turned into the walk at Number 12, glancing with a rather shrinking eye at Jack, who was playing at jackstones in the other end of the porch with a stout, red-headed little

girl whom Mr. Boyle did not recognize. Brunhilda was in an equal ignorance. "Who's that old gentleman, Jack?" she asked, crunching a hoarhound drop; she was allowed a dime a day which by choice she would have expended on chocolate soda; it bought them a soda apiece at the neighborhood drug store, where the clerk was very kind to both of them. But Jack had a sore throat and sniffing cold, and Brunhilda had maternally decided that the hoarhound was better for him. "Who is he?" said Brunhilda, then, crunching away.

"I don't know — Letty knows," said Jack, crunching too, in great content.

Mr. Boyle went into the little chilly parlor — the Dodsley family were obliged to economize coal, though the cool weather was beginning — and said how-do-you-do to the lady of the house, who got up with her work, in a little surprise to see him. The visit was something unprecedented; Mr. Boyle felt it so himself, and began to explain at once.

"I called because I want to talk to you about some business connected with the Estate, Mrs. Dodsley," he said. "A — um — you know, of course, I am winding up Mr. Gates's affairs. It has necessitated selling the Broad Street house and furnishings; some of the Riggins heirs are here — two ladies — perhaps you've heard from them already?"

"No," said Letty; and she added quickly; "I'm no relation of the Riggins family, Mr. Boyle. Ever so many people make that mistake, but I thought you knew." She was quite sure he had come to tell her that Jack's pension was to be withdrawn — a natural enough proceeding; but the errand could not be a pleasant one for either one of them. However, Mr. Boyle was not ready yet, it would seem, to come to that point.

"Oh, yes, I know that — I know all about the Breen connection. I just thought maybe you'd met these

ladies, on account of your having been so intimate with Dan — with Mr. Gates, I mean,” said Mr. Boyle, fumbling in his inner pockets and finally bringing forth a very large, exceedingly white and fresh handkerchief, with the aid of which he blew a resounding blast, before going into further explorations, and extracting a letter-case, into which he probed still further. “The house is being dismantled, as I was saying, and everything sent away. And it appears there’s an oil-painting there which the ladies agreed with me must be the one referred to in this letter. I didn’t know but what they’d turned it over to you already, in accordance with his wishes. It’s a life-size portrait — perhaps you recall it — ?”

“Is it the picture he used to call ‘The Lady with the Sampler’? Letty asked. And Mr. Boyle nodding with a fresh application of the handkerchief, she said: “I remember his saying once that he was going to leave me that in his will. But it was just in fun, you know — just in fun. I never thought —” she looked down. They were both silent a moment, thinking of the dead man.

“Mr. Gates said something to you about it, too?” Letty inquired at last.

Mr. Boyle cleared his throat. “Well, in point of fact, there wasn’t any *will*, Mrs. Dodsley. Poor Dan never made any, being such a young man,” said the old gentleman, to whom fifty-one-or-two was the salad age; “he wasn’t looking to die. But about this letter, now; he wrote it to me the last of January, about six weeks before he died. Seems as if he may have had some kind of premonition — I don’t know — of course, I don’t believe much in those things,” Mr. Boyle said vaguely and even a little shyly. “He was in good health; he says here he hadn’t felt so well for a long while. Anyhow, here’s what he says in regard to that picture, and another matter —” he cleared his throat again; “it’s

dated *Grand Hôtel de l'Europe*, Alexandria, January 26, 1903. 'Dear Boyle: I am here for a day or two to see some people off for the U. S. It makes me feel rather like going home myself; one gets tired of knocking about, and I find I don't enjoy it as much as I used. Getting old, I suppose, although I never felt better in my life. However, I shall finish out the cold weather here, anyhow; and if I decide to sail for home this Spring, will stay long enough for Easter in Rome, so you needn't expect me before May at the earliest.

"The idea of getting old makes me think of what I have often thought about before, but precipitately forgot, because it wasn't the most agreeable thing in the world; to wit, viz. namely, i.e. making my will! As soon as I get home, or before my next trip, anyway, I shall certainly do it and have it over with. Men used to in the old days whenever they committed their lives to the perils of the deep, and foreign travel; and nowadays the sea goes down just as far and comes up just as wet, and makes you just as sick as it ever did, and the foreign robbers are worse, if anything! I have sometimes felt that to a man as alone in the world as I am, without wife or children, the disposition of his property need be a matter of small consequence. The law attends to it as impartially as he possibly can — so why worry? But latterly I have thought of a few directions I should like to leave. Poor Jack Dodsley ought to be provided for some way; perhaps the best would be to settle something on his wife. You know I inherited something of Bishop Breen's property through my aunt; it amounted to fifty or sixty thousand dollars, and it seems to me it would be fair to give it back, not to the entire family, but to Mrs. Jack Dodsley, who needs it more and probably deserves it more than any of the rest of them, or give her a life estate in it, anyhow. I once screwed myself to the point of making a list of some of the things in the house and the people I wanted them

given to ; and young Mrs. Dodsley is to have the painting called "The Lady with the Sampler." . . .

"We found the list in his desk, and we've carried out the instructions as far as possible," Mr. Boyle broke off his reading to say. He went on: "'However, we can discuss all this when I reach home. Kindest regards to all the office. . . .' — um — and that's about all," said Mr. Boyle, taking off his eye-glasses. "I'm a little late coming to see you about this, Mrs. Dodsley, but I've been pretty busy with things that had to come first — you understand, of course. And then I had to see or write to all the heirs — there're nine of 'em — and find out what they wanted to do about it, and — well, take it all around, it's been a long business."

"Do about it? Do about what?" said Letty, puzzled; "about the picture? I think they're very kind to give it to me, Mr. Boyle, and if you'll tell me who I'd better write to — to thank, you know — I'll —"

"Well no, I didn't mean that altogether," he interrupted; "I mean this other thing, about the provision for your husband, and the other idea Daniel expressed here about the Bishop Breen property —"

"Why, that's — that's not of any importance, is it? That's just something he was *thinking* of doing. That doesn't count in — in law, does it?"

"No, not strictly, perhaps, but — You see, Mrs. Dodsley," said Mr. Boyle, leaning forward, and speaking with a good deal of earnestness, "the Rigginses — the heirs, you know — why, they're very good sort of people — the best kind of people. They've got all the money anybody could possibly need, to be sure, but it's been my experience that having a lot of money don't keep people from being ready and glad to get a lot more. No matter how much a man has, his expenses about square up with his income. Rich people seldom ever *feel* rich, like we think they do. Well now, what I want to say is that the Rigginses aren't any different that way

from other rich people I've known, but they're very square-acting, and when they found out — when I showed 'em, you know — that poor Dan had thought of doing this, though he hadn't gone to a lawyer and got it written down and signed it before witnesses and all that, still they recognized it put a kind of a — a moral obligation on them. They're all of 'em willing to do something for Jack — either to keep on with the present arrangement, or to do something along the lines Dan had in mind. Of course —" said the old gentleman hastily — "of course they wouldn't — er — they wouldn't — er — they wouldn't hand over the whole amount. Fifty or sixty thousand, you know — Nobody'd expect *that* of them, as long as they're doing it, as you might say, out of sheer good-will and right feeling. But any reasonable sum — say a third? They've authorized me to offer you a third —" he stopped and looked at Letty expectantly.

She had got up, her work slipping down out of her lap, and her thimble and spools clattering and rolling about the floor. "I don't want anything — I don't want them to give me anything, Mr. Boyle," said Letty, reddening and speaking fast. "There's no obligation at all. Whatever Mr. Gates owed to Uncle Sylvanus, he — he discharged that debt long ago. Why, Mr. Boyle, you *know* he did! He gave my grandfather money for years — and Mrs. Von Donhoff, my aunt, you know. I remember seeing the checks with your name signed on them — when Mr. Gates wasn't at home, I suppose. Don't the family know? Haven't you told them? They ought to be told."

"Oh, yes, naturally I told them all that. But that hasn't got anything to do with *this*, Mrs. Dodsley," said Mr. Boyle, in a mild, patient, and reasonable manner. He was used to dealing with excited women. "The Riggins people want to make you a fair proposition. It concerns you yourself, and nobody else. From my

point of view, there can't be any possible objection to your accepting the offer. I don't think anybody could criticise you for it. Now you want to think it over, before you go refusing slapdash."

Letty made a violent gesture. "No, no, you don't understand. I don't care what anybody thinks — it doesn't make any difference who criticises or what they say. I can't take it. Tell them I thank them — tell them I appreciate their kindness and their generosity. But I can't do it — I can't take it."

"Well, now," said Mr. Boyle, smiling slightly; "they ain't going to ram fifteen or twenty thousand dollars down your throat exactly, so there's no call to worry. If you don't want it, you don't want it, and that settles the hash. But hadn't you better talk to some of your own family about it — talk to Mr. William Breen or somebody? You don't want to act hastily. Just think it over or talk it over, and let me know in two or three days. You might change your mind."

"No, I won't. I tell you I won't take it," said Letty, still fiercely. "Never mind the things, Mr. Boyle — I'll pick them up."

But the old gentleman gallantly got down on his rather stiff old joints and gathered up the spools and rolls of tape which had barely ceased spinning, so brief had been the above conversation. "Business pretty good?" inquired Mr. Boyle, scrambling up and dusting himself, a little out of breath; he was a portly build.

"Yes, indeed!" Letty assured him, brightly. "I've all the orders I can fill. And there'll be more work at Christmas-time, I expect."

Old Boyle felt himself unexpectedly touched by something brave and buoyant in her attitude; he shook her hand warmly in parting, and, hearing Jack come into the back hall, coughing hard, got himself out of the house as expeditiously as might be; he was one of the persons who most emphatically did not want to en-

counter Jack. "She'll change her mind, I guess, when she's slept on it," he thought, as he walked away. He honestly hoped she would, although he would say nothing further to influence her, considering it his duty to both sides to remain, as it were, impersonal. "The heirs can afford it, though ; and she's had a hard time, and shown a very good spirit," he said to himself. "Pretty woman! Daniel used to think her very attractive, I believe."

CHAPTER VI

THE next morning did, indeed, find Letty somewhat shaken from her first high resolves ; Mr. Boyle was justified, though could he have known it, it is likely he would have felt no particular satisfaction nor, as one might carelessly suppose, either amusement or contempt, being after his fashion a good deal too much of a philosopher. He was an old man, and he had seen the world. Letty, on the other hand, had moments when she despised her own vacillation ; or stood in a kind of amazement and fright before the muddle of her mind. She tried with desperation to think straight, and connectedly, and with fairness. They were very poor, she told herself ; with all her efforts, — which, to be just, she did not look upon as especially creditable, merely as natural and necessary, — with all her work, with Jack's pension, and with the money that her uncle gave them, they could barely get along. There was no question of putting by for a rainy day — the storm was upon her now. She spent racking hours wondering if So-and-So would pay her, and how she herself could pay Such-a-One, unless this or that money came. What would become of the house — of Jack — of all of them, she sometimes thought with a stab of terror, if she should fall ill, or her hands be crippled, or her eyesight fail !

Now here was a way out, a rock of refuge, a release from care, in part at least. If the fifteen or twenty thousand dollars which it seemed to her Mr. Boyle spoke of with an unaccountably unappreciative lightness would not support them entirely, it would, at any rate, remove two-thirds of the burden. She would keep on with her needlework, of course ; she had no notion of

abandoning that; and if her custom increased, as it gave promise of doing, they might actually be easier than they were before Jack's disability! Besides, they would no longer need the help of William Breen, something which Letty had shrunk painfully from taking. And after all, she did have a sort of claim on the money; it was not as if she were accepting charity from the Riggins family; she had asked nothing of them. Decidedly the part of prudence, even of good feeling, was to take it. Gates's letter —

With the thought of the letter, whose every phrase she imagined she could perfectly recall, a company of strangely assorted memories charged across Letty's mind. She thought of the man who had written it with a certain wistfulness. She had not loved him; his love for her was not the kind of which any woman could be proud; yet she could not but linger over the remembrance of him with regret. He had a quick and generous spirit, fond of the good things of this world, gay and hearty; that he should have to die suddenly and alone in an alien place was inexpressibly sad. He had wanted to take care of her at the last — to provide for her. At that last unlucky phrase, a thought, which in fact had been her first upon hearing the letter read, revisited her, coloring her face with hot shame even in the night and darkness. Provide for her! That was the way the monarchs of past days served their favorites! "And, to be sure, what was I but his mistress — morally, at any rate," thought Letty, with her ruthless frankness; "it's all very well to say *nothing happened* — does that smooth it over? Does that whitewash either one of us? He thought of it — I thought of it — we planned between us —! If it had not been for that, would he have dreamed of providing for me? Nobody knows anything about it; but *I* know. Isn't that enough? Even in that letter he used Jack for a shield — Jack must be taken care of! Oh, we were shameful! Poor, helpless

Jack that never wronged or harmed anybody in his life, and loved us both ! Take his money ! Why, what have I been thinking of ? I can't do it — I'll never do it !" She heard Jack coughing in his sleep, and sat up nervously. "I'd better make him take some quinine to-morrow," she thought ; and laid down again to the tortured debate, with a glance of grim amusement at her own incongruities.

Once or twice the next day she thought with the same hard satire that it was fortunate Mr. Boyle had not set an earlier date for her to render her decision, since she was never in the same mind for two hours in succession. She fought her dreary battle quite alone, as, in truth, she had always been ; there was nobody she could take into her confidence ; she had not even let old Mrs. Dodsley know anything about the offer. But after some hesitation she wrote a note to her Uncle William, reciting the terms of it and the objections she had made to Mr. Boyle. Letty knew very well that a refusal on the grounds she had given that gentleman must seem to him and everybody else perfectly unreasonable and Quixotic, but she told herself (in one of her refusing moods) that she did not care. "They may think what they choose, I won't take it !" she decided firmly.

Late in the afternoon an expressman called and deposited a mightily muffled and corded object in a sloping attitude against the wall of the front room, in the only space large enough to accommodate it ; and obligingly ripped off the clothes-line and burlaps in which it was cased up, with his pocket-knife, while Letty signed his book. "Gee ! That's some frame, ain't it ?" he commented admiringly when the gilt scrolls of ribbon, the garlands and crossed flambeaux of Gates's carefully selected eighteenth-century frame emerged to view. The picture, which had never seemed unusually large on the walls and with the high ceilings of Gates's portrait room, took on startling proportions in Letty's little

house; Mistress Elinor Breen looked extraordinarily alive. There she sat with her black hair rolled up over a high cushion and a trifle of lace coquettishly askew on the top of it, with her black eyes steady and unashamed, with her musing smile, with her pink, dully-figured brocade skirts and her muslin fichu, and the embroidery frame in her fine, slender hands—there she sat and contemplated this descendant in whom she might perhaps have recognized a strong kinship of spirit, setting apart the seizing resemblance between their two faces. Letty eyed her back with a kind of sarcastic sympathy. “*You* were found out!” she said aloud; “yet I daresay you had made your husband very happy all along, and done your duty after one fashion. Probably you did your best to have things comfortable and pleasant; you thought it wouldn’t be ladylike not to! Don’t *I* know?”

Mrs. David, who had heard the tale of the queer discovery of Letty’s great-grandmother in “The Lady with the Sampler,” without the details of the original’s deplorable history, was delighted with the appearance of the portrait in their parlor. “Well, we certainly have got beautiful old things, if we *do* have to scuffle along, Letty,” she said, surveying their ancient magohany and furnishings with pride; “lots of these new people would give a good deal of their money to have your great-grandmother, and some of your family-pieces. *That’s* something they can’t buy!”

Not hearing anything from her uncle in reply to the letter, Letty began to think that he considered the business none of his, or felt a restraint about offering her counsel lest she might put down whatever he said to some lurking self-interest, when one evening William walked in, accompanied by a guest whom Letty saw with surprise, although it appeared he had been in town a week already. This was Thomas Breen—and pretty old, bald-headed and ill-kept Thomas looked these days in spite of very shiny boots, and a strong-hued

necktie, and a shirt of radiant stripes; yes, Thomas had ceased to be handsome and dashing, and his rich mustachios were become a soiled gray, and he was only a fat, shabbily overdressed old man, with an uncertain eye — alas, alas! Letty had not seen him for ten years; and now he announced, greeting her with his customary loud and jovial words, and rather more voluble in explanation than was necessary, that he was just passing through — just passing through. He had been busy — abysmally busy — monumentally busy — or he would have come to see her before this, he said profusely, meanwhile directing apprehensive looks about the room and, in particular, towards the doors. Was — er — was Jack — er — here, or — or *around*, you know? How was he — er — getting on?

"He's upstairs. I think you'd better not see him — he's quite sick with a cold," Letty said quickly, divining what was in her Uncle Tom's mind, and noting his look of relief at this news with a sort of philosophical contempt. It was natural for people to be afraid of seeing Jack, but it was ignoble, too. Strange to relate, out of all Letty's acquaintance, her neighbor Mr. James Hatfield, that socially untutored gentleman and retired financial buccaneer, was the only person who at the first and always since had borne himself towards Jack with absolutely no change of manner, meeting him without either curiosity or aversion or offensive pity.

Thomas said something about it's being a shame — by George, it was a shame! — He'd been distressed to hear it. Couldn't understand why those things had to happen. She must have had a hard time — "but you're looking well, Letty. And not a day older — by George, pretty as ever!" he wound up enthusiastically. It was really true; for all her cares and tasks Letty's thin face was still unlined; her thin figure still kept a grace of youth; and still there was about her that momentary pale brilliance which beguiled so many people into a

false notion of her good looks. "Is that the picture you were telling me about, Will?" her uncle asked, catching sight of it; and he got up and examined it with exclamations of wonder and much by-George-ing. "Well, it does look like you, Letty — it's remarkable! It was through the likeness, somehow or other, that you got to knowing this Mr. Gates so well, wasn't it? Seems to me your wife told me so, Will. I remember meeting Mr. Gates at Uncle Syl's funeral — that's about twenty years ago now, I think. Nice fellow! And I don't know that you can blame him exactly for collaring all the money, the bishop's and all, the way he did afterwards — any man would have done the same in his place, I guess."

Letty listened to these diplomatic approaches with some inward scoffing; it was no concern of Thomas Breen's, but she supposed that he was taking this way of showing his interest in her now that she was likely to have some increase of means; and, after the consistent neglect of the last ten years, it was not quite easy to believe in her uncle's sincerity. But William, who had been rather silent hitherto, now spoke in a plain and direct way, refreshing to hear.

"I got your letter, Letty," he said; "now this proposition of the Riggins heirs — I don't know whether I understand all the ins and outs of it from what you wrote. Now if you'll just go over it again and tell us exactly what Mr. Boyle said —"

Letty repeated the whole interview as closely as she could recollect it, both the men sitting silent throughout the recital, even Thomas listening with a most businesslike decorum. "Then, as I understand it, you simply declined his offer?" said William, at the end.

"Yes," Letty said a little nervously; "I — thought at that time that I oughtn't to take it from them. But Mr. Boyle wanted me to reconsider, you know; he told me to talk to you about it."

"Didn't you say that Gates said — didn't you say he said in that letter, acknowledged it right out — that he'd got fifty or sixty thousand from Uncle Sylvanus's estate?" demanded Tom Breen.

"Yes. But you know he had done a great deal for the family ever since. He —"

"Well, he was pretty late finding out what he owed us, I think," said Thomas, in righteous indignation and contempt. "By George, Letty, I'm glad you refused. You did just right in my opinion. You go ahead and stick to it. Don't you take any piddling little fifteen or twenty thousand when you've got as good a claim as that on the whole of it. You were pretty smart to see that point all by yourself. I guess this old Boyle fellow thought you were nothing but a woman, and he could fool you easy. But we don't have that kind of women in the Breen family!" And here Thomas eyed his niece over with thoroughgoing admiration and approval. "You were pretty smart to see through his scheme. We may have our faults as a family, but I've yet to hear of a dull Breen!"

Letty looked at him with a blankness of face that expressed the blankness of her mind. "I — I'm afraid I'm a dull Breen, Uncle Tom," she said, embarrassed and apologetic; "I *don't* see at all — I didn't see anything when Mr. Boyle was talking to me. Isn't it all right? The Riggins people are making me a very kind offer, aren't they? That's what I thought, anyhow."

"Kind offer — *nothing!*" cried out Thomas. His admiration faded swiftly to pained astonishment. "I'll bet you'd have a good case in court, and they thought they'd fix you, before you had time to find out about it. Kind offer — hunch! They're just trying to see how cheap they can get out of it. Boyle's in cahoots with 'em, of course. Why, anybody can see it! They wouldn't take the trouble to offer you a cent — they

wouldn't turn over a hand for you, if they weren't afraid of what you might do. Isn't that so, Will?"

"Well, I don't know, Tom," said William, uncertainly; "Mr. Boyle didn't need to let Letty see that letter from Mr. Gates at all, you know —"

"Oh, bosh! Letty might have had a dozen letters from him herself with the same thing in 'em for all they knew. They don't know how much she knows; the thing they're afraid of is that she'll find out the value of it. People don't go giving away fifteen or twenty thousand dollars for sentiment — just because they think it's *right*!" said Thomas, with scornful conviction.

"You wouldn't, I'm sure!" said Letty, pleasantly; it might have been old Edward Breen talking, and William cast a troubled look at her through his spectacles.

"Well, you declined the offer, anyhow, by good luck, it seems," said Tom Breen, unheeding. "So there's no harm done so far. Next time Boyle comes around, you can just let him know you've got men in the family that will see this thing through, Letty. You just show him we've put you *on* to his little game. I'll bet you'll be surprised at the results — you'll be surprised at the way he'll raise his figures. He has to have *his* rake-off, too, you know; and likely they'll give the whole amount rather than go to law about it. Might as well give it to you as give it to the lawyers."

"I think you're mistaken about Mr. Boyle and about the Riggins family, Uncle Tom," said Letty, making a strong effort. "But I am going to refuse the offer —"

"Yes, that's right — that's what I'm telling you."

"I mean I'm going to refuse it once for all!" said Letty; in spite of her, her voice rose. "I know as much about the Rigginses as you do, and I choose to believe them decent, honest, kind people. You don't think so. That's nothing to me. You want me to haggle and bargain with them on your mean supposition. I won't do it. I'll not take a penny of their

money. I'll be the one Breen that's not beholden to strangers' charity, anyhow; we've had enough of thieves and beggars in this family—" she stopped short, seeing the two men exchange glances of alarm and realizing that the violence of her speech seemed to them unbecoming and unwomanly and that it only shocked them instead of convincing.

"Why, Letty, you're all hysterical and worn out worrying over this thing," said her Uncle Thomas, soothingly and conciliatingly. "Why, I don't want you to bargain with the Rigginses. I don't want you to do anything like that, you know. Now just quiet down a little. We're only trying to help you. You don't have to have anything to do with Boyle or the rest of them, if they keep on bothering you this way. We'll see to it all —"

"Never mind, Tom, you — you can't do anything like that. It's Letty's own business, and she's got the say, you know," said William, intervening somewhat impatiently. He turned to Letty nervously. "Now, don't let's have any more talk or a — a scene. You know you don't have to take the money if you don't want to. Do just what you choose. Even if you don't take it, we can all get along somehow, I guess. We've got along this far, and we aren't any of us busted up yet," said William, forcing a smile. Letty remembered ruefully that she could pay him with the Riggins money — she could relieve him, if she took it. But William himself unconsciously supplied the last nail to clench her contrary determination, with his very next words.

"There's something in what your Uncle Tom says," he remarked judicially; "so in your place I wouldn't do anything without consulting a lawyer. That can't do any harm. You might as well know where the Riggins people stand."

Letty looked from one to the other of them, feeling herself maddeningly helpless, not indeed as to the out-

come of the Riggins negotiations, for in any case hers would be the final word, and now her mind was steadfast; but she was helpless to make them understand, to argue them out of a view that seemed to her at once dull and contemptible. To the end of their days she would be thought a crazy fool, and by her poor Uncle William at least, an ill-natured and selfish fool into the bargain!

"Well, anyway, if you don't feel like making it so warm for them, why, you can always take their first offer. Half a loaf's better than no bread!" said Thomas, with fully as sage and shrewd and convinced an air as that with which he had uttered precisely the opposite opinion scarcely five minutes before! It was not easy to disconcert Mr. Thomas Breen; he was able to take any side of any question on an instant's notice, and the most popular view always enlisted his ready sympathies. Letty had a moment of wonder that she had taken him so seriously. What was the use of flying into such a passion, and screaming out brutal phrases at the poor old jolly down-at-heel scoundrel? In his way he was fond of her, and in his way he had always been kind to her; she was mortified at her own momentary lack of self-control.

"It's ever so good of you, Uncle Tom, to — to — to worry about me this way," she said, hesitating half a second over the words to describe her uncle's attitude. If there was one thing Mr. Breen had not been doing, and had not the remotest notion of doing, it was to "worry" over his niece and her affairs; and Letty had to keep back a smile even as she spoke. "But you've always been good to me," she went on with real warmth; "don't you remember how you were always giving me things and taking me places when I was a girl? You were lovely!"

"Yes — by George, yes!" said Thomas, delighted; "remember 'Evangeline'? I believe that was the

first time you ever went to the theatre in your life. Remember Dixey imitating Henry Irving? How well he danced, didn't he? And Jefferson — 'My head, my head! What shall I say to Dame Van Winkle?' — hey? Ha, ha! And that hat we got for you, Letty — the one with the whaling big roses on, I mean. By George, you looked out of sight in that hat!" He threw back his head laughing at these pleasant reminiscences. But William Breen said with some anxiety, —

"When did Mr. Boyle say you were to let him know, Letty?"

Before she could answer there was a step on the porch — steps, in fact; and there presently entered in the doctor — whom, as Letty hurriedly explained to the others, she had sent for on Jack's account — and another gentleman who himself began to explain, on seeing her: "I thought I'd come over and inquire how your husband was, Mrs. Dodsley. You see my kid raised such a row when you telephoned that he was too sick to see her, that I had to do something to keep her quiet —" and here Mr. Hatfield, catching sight of the other visitors, halted abruptly with a very queer look on his large, rough, red countenance. "Ho — ha — Mr. Breen, howdy-do?" said he. And, "Hum — oh — howdy-do, Hatfield?" said Thomas, in a corresponding manner. The meeting figured — as one might fancy — that of the two augurs in the streets of Rome! But, though Hatfield recovered in an instant and grinned, and went on talking in an entirely unconscious and undisturbed ease, Mr. Breen exhibited, somehow, the appearance of a pricked balloon; and, for the first time in any one's knowledge, was quite silent, constrained, and awkward. What ailed Thomas? Nobody, unless it might be Hatfield himself, could have told; and this latter was not given to any sort of confidential gossip.

"How'd Letty come to be so thick with that fellow?"

Thomas growled to William as they walked away from the house together.

"I don't know exactly. His little girl's very fond of poor Jack; I suppose that's how it happened. He seems to be all right now — very well thought of, though there was a lot of talk at one time, I believe. Why? You knew him before — some place else?"

The other gave no direct answer, however, merely looking oracular and wagging his head. "Queer to see how anxious Letty was about Jack," he observed, changing the subject; "having the doctor, the minute he gets a little cold, and worrying like everything! By George, if it didn't sound so awful, I'd say the best thing the poor fellow could do, would be to die, and let her get rid of the care of him!"

CHAPTER VII

DURING the remaining few days of his visit, Mr. Thomas Breen could not find time for another call on his niece, notwithstanding his almost parental affection, his sympathy, and his desire to help her. Possibly if she had acted on his suggestions as regarded the Riggins offer, or even accepted it as it stood, he might have shown a more persistent interest. Thomas was a little remarkable that way; seldom did any member of his family, to the most distant relative who bore the noble name of Breen — seldom did any one of them inherit, receive, earn, get hold of by whatever means, any considerable sum of money, that Thomas Breen did not appear on the spot shortly thereafter, with an amazing timeliness, always ready with his kind advice, his acute and practical hints. "Blood's thicker than water, by George!" — thus on these occasions did he express his creed. And nothing but the pressing nature of his affairs, of course, in this instance, prevented him from giving Letty the benefit of his further thought; presently Thomas vanished, after his bird-of-passage habit, and the next news Letty had of him was contained in a letter from her Aunt Helen which arrived within the week.

Madame Von Donhoff had written in a terrific state of excitement and anxiety; the letter was a strange hash of French and English intermingled, in the old lady's unsteady hand. What was this she heard? But, my dear Letty, was it possible that the Rigginses, at last acknowledging their debt to her dear brother, to whom they owed almost their entire fortune — for

Sylvanus was a *man of wealth* and a *Christian gentleman* when he married into these Rigginses, and it was owing solely to his wonderful management that his wife, who was notoriously stingy, had been able to accumulate so much — was it possible that they had approached themselves to Letty with offers of a financial settlement of her *claims*, and that she had *refused*? But of what, then, was she thinking? Did she know — did she understand the narrow condition to which they were all reduced? Her Uncle Tom had reported her indifference — an indifference which touched the selfishness —

Letty put the letter down — there were a half-dozen sheets of it — with her smile. She was not likely to be deterred by anything Madame Helen could say, and went back to her work unfalteringly. At the time, she was sitting in the bedroom where Jack was now confined, with a piece of embroidery in her hands; for even with the added duties of a nurse, she could not abandon her business, and Jack's illness was not so serious as to need every moment's attention. "Nobody could get grippe from these things I'm working on, doctor?" she asked conscientiously; "it's not carried that way, is it?" And the doctor assuring her with a laugh that there was no danger, Letty kept on plying her needle with a fanatical industry. The main thing was to keep the sick man quiet and contented, which could only be done by her continual presence. Jack was touchingly patient with his fever and his painful cough, but he fretted sadly when Letty left the room, croaked a welcome for her when she returned, and could not be persuaded to take his food or medicine from any other hand.

Letty spent hours by his bedside with a shaded lamp, or by the window with the curtain lowered to admit just enough light to fall across her hands, working, working with an energy about which there was some-

thing tragic. The harassed woman clung to her "business" as to the one stable and worthy thing of her life. In the bottom of her heart she knew that she could never even make a bare living at it — knew that sooner or later her back must be against the wall — still she worked on, shabbily and desperately heroic. She would take no help without first, at least, exhausting her own uttermost resources; nobody should have the chance to point out that she might have done this or that. "The man or woman doesn't live that can say I haven't done my duty!" she would sometimes think in a kind of fury. And not infrequently at such moments, certain passages of the past would rise before her mockingly.

Jack had been sick a fortnight and was mending slightly when one day Letty was called downstairs by the sound of Mrs. William Breen's voice in her hall, coupled with another in low and rather mumbling tones which she did not at first recognize. And seeing her aunt standing alone at the foot of the stairs, Letty looked around, somewhat puzzled, for the other speaker. "Guess who I've brought — guess who I've brought!" cried out the other, perceiving this glance of inquiry; but, to tell the truth, Mrs. Tump's accent was not quite so free and gayly assured as her words. She was a poor hand at any sort of polite deception, unlike the socially adept Mrs. Letty, and it was with a very doubtful and uneasy look on her face that she explained: "It's your father — *there!* What do you think of that! He came over this morning, and Will just told him he'd have to stay with us, because we knew you didn't have any room, and Jack being sick, and your work, and all. He's in the parlor, and — and — I guess I'll have to go, Letty. I'd love to stay, but I've got an errand — lots of errands, I mean —" said Mrs. William, nervously making for the door. She had a pretty well-defined idea by this time that her brother-in-law, Mr. Henry

Breen, might not be the exemplary and hardly used character she had at first supposed him; maybe the long-suffering William had let drop a hint or two. Mrs. William, who was probity and truthfulness itself, and had never harbored an unkind thought about anybody in her whole life, was sorely put to it to bear herself correctly in this position. "I've got to be going," she said, fairly running out of the house. "Good-by—er—er, H-Henry!" she called to him, boggling woefully over the familiar address. Have a defaulting, absconding person—really no better than a thief, you know—in your house, and call him by name like that! *Henry!* Mrs. Breen felt as if she had surrendered some rock-ribbed fortress of principle—thrown down the barrier—abandoned the standard—degraded herself for the sake of a miserable convention! "I can't help it. He's the children's own father's brother—and Letty's father. I just *have* to do it!" the poor lady thought as she scurried away; and without a doubt she asked pardon of her Deity that night in the prayers she offered up by her bedside.

Letty went into the parlor and found her father standing surveying the portrait of Mrs. Elinor Breen, which had been hung the other day. He turned around; he had not changed much—hardly a wrinkle or an additional gray hair since the first day Letty saw him. His very clothes might have been the same, and the faint odor of his accustomed hair-dye stole about the room; indeed, Letty got a good whiff of it as she submitted with an Indian stoicism to his fatherly embrace. "What was the name of the stuff? Something-or-other *des Indes*, I believe," went through her mind.

"My dear daughter! You poor dear afflicted child!" said Mr. Breen, tenderly, pulling out a handkerchief. "How is your dear husband? *How* is Jack?" he inquired funereally.

"Jack has been quite sick with a cold, but he's getting better," said Letty, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"I didn't mean that — I meant *this*, you know," said her father, tapping his forehead with intense significance. "He — is he *around* anywhere?" he added warily. "He — ah — he's never violent, is he, Letty?"

"No. He's just the same. It will never be any better. He won't be 'around.' Don't be afraid," Letty told him succinctly. She was wondering what had brought her father here; certainly it was not solicitude about Jack, to whose misfortune he had never paid any attention when the news of it reached him, nor during all this while since.

"Well, it's very sad — very sad. I never expected to see you brought down to this," said Mr. Breen, gravely, and shaking his head. "A daughter of mine — a Breen —"

"Brought down to what? I don't understand," Letty said, conquering a sneer. "Do you mean that I have to work? But if you had ever had any experience at working, you would know that it's no hardship." She knew that this kind of speech would take no effect on her father; she scornfully told herself that to address anything like sarcasm to him was like beating on an empty keg or a feather-bed. He received it in some part of his mind or spirit which must be absolutely devoid of sensation; he could not or would not comprehend. And now he went on heavily, almost as if she had not spoken, with his large, blue, expressionless eyes regarding her unwaveringly.

"Tom — your Uncle Tom — told us how you were working. He was telling us about seeing you here —"

"Oh!" said Letty, enlightened. "Then he told you, of course, about the offer I had from the Riggins Estate?" she inquired rapidly; she was impatient to get back to Jack, whom she fancied she heard moving about restlessly overhead; and knew that, left to him-

self, it would take her father half an hour to come to the point. "I refused it. That was what you wanted to see me about?"

He looked at her startled. "Wh — why, how did you know? What made you think of that?" said Mr. Breen, stammering.

"I thought nothing else would have brought you here. I have heard from every member of my affectionate, disinterested family, and it is natural that I should hear from you, too," Letty said, threading her needle. She set a stitch. "Well?" she said, raising her black eyes.

"Well — er — well — the fact is — what makes you refuse, Letty? It's *yours* — what *makes* you refuse it?" said her father, disconcerted for once, and plainly abandoning some carefully planned series of remarks destined to lead up to this question in a more tactful manner. His tone was almost fretful as he repeated, "What on earth did you refuse for?"

"I think we've had enough from the Riggins people already. And if that's not reason enough for you, I refused because I chose to — because it was my whim — because it was my good pleasure. That's enough reason for you or anybody!" said Letty, uttering this hard speech, however, in a perfectly moderate and even voice, without any sign of temper.

"But you — you haven't really *told* them you wouldn't take it, Letty?" said her father, in a ghastly anxiety; "Tom said he didn't know that you had quite made up your mind yet, and I might get here in time to stop you."

Letty heard this last suggestion with a shrug. "As it happens I wrote to Mr. Boyle, definitely refusing, a week ago," she said; and smiled at the piteous disappointment of her father's face.

"Oh, Letty! And it would have made us all so comfortable!"

Letty listened to the jeremiad in her chilly silence;

it lasted a long while, for Mr. Breen displayed the tenacity, and perhaps the cunning, of a feeble character. He may have been hoping to wear her out, but Letty, for her own part, developed an obstinacy that, whether it indicated weakness or strength, matched his own; and every complaint, reproach, and argument her father uttered served only to clinch her determination. No, she would not write to Mr. Boyle again — no, she would not tell them she had thought better of it — no, she would not employ a lawyer. She was quite cool and self-possessed throughout, but trembled a good deal and caught her breath as she went upstairs at last. “If they come and hound me any more about it, I’ll go mad — I’ll go mad!” she said to herself a little wildly. The fire had gone down, and the room felt cold as she went into it; and Jack was shivering and whimpering to himself under the bedclothes.

It is so weary a business to contemplate — let alone recite! — the sort of sordid struggle with which all the last chapters have been concerned; there is so much we find perplexing and dissatisfying about this unlucky heroine with her incomprehensible selfishness and unselfishness, her weaknesses and her petty strength — all this, I say, is so disheartening that I propose we now abandon it for a while and turn to the pleasanter spectacle of prosperity and ease and an unvexed soul exhibited by worthy individuals such as — as Mr. James Hatfield, for instance. Let us behold Mr. Hatfield, who, after what physical and mental strife, and moral wear and tear it is none of our business to inquire, was now sitting down tranquilly under his own vine and fig-tree, even as do the righteous; virtue alone is happiness below! James had his life pretty well regulated by this time. He devoted a few hours — two or three — of each day to money matters, footing up his accounts, household and personal, signing checks, and inspecting

investments, cutting coupons (according to the generally accepted belief) and indulging in the kindred pastimes of capitalists, in a little office adjoining the splendid suite of bedroom, dressing-room, and so on, which he had built for himself. His mail was brought in and opened there; he read the morning paper; and there Mr. Hatfield interviewed his domestics and indicated to them his pleasure. Possibly he spun out these proceedings unduly; he had not yet managed to acquire the arts of idleness, and must often have been at his wits' end to get through the time. Punctually at eleven o'clock every day he entered upon a course of exercises designed to keep him in condition, and to reduce the flesh which latterly had shown a disastrous tendency to increase all over his big, square-built frame. Hatfield went at the job with that thoroughness and that conquering disposition which characterized him. Daily he rode a certain number of miles on a frightfully hard-trotting thoroughbred, pounding along through the outskirts of the town, and on to the open country, rain or shine; daily he performed fantastic evolutions with dumb-bells and punching-bags in his gymnasium, or paced doggedly around a cinder track he had had laid out in a retired corner of his grounds, sweating in a knitted wool coat, good-humoredly exchanging rough chaff with the trainer whom he occasionally called in to supervise the drill.

He had not many companions or friends. The time had been when Mr. Hatfield very much affected the society of those diamond-bestudded, flashily tailored, sporting gentlemen whom his little daughter could still dimly remember with their loud voices and clinking bottles and their talk about women and horses and cards and other matters equally beyond Brunhilda's understanding; the time had been — and not so far distant, either — when Mr. Hatfield could conceive of nothing more agreeable than to be with “the boys” and of “the

boys." Contrary to the classic axiom, he had changed with his skies; James was a family man now. He still smoked his cigar and took a drink when he felt like it, but when he swore before her, he begged Brunhilda's pardon, and he was very strong on the subjects of etiquette for little girls, and observance of Sunday, and unremitting attendance at school. He looked at her French and German primers and examined her exercises in drawing and composition with a profoundly critical air; he went to the school exhibitions and sat on the platform or amongst the smilingly excited mothers, nervously grinning and feeling his stubbly mustache, while the youngsters displayed their prowess at speaking pieces or at their singing games. Moreover, James considered it his paternal duty to inquire severely into the moral character of every theatrical "show" before he bought his tickets; and when he drove or walked out with the child, used to look anxiously for the ladies to whom he could raise his hat. "Got to stand in with the ladies — you can't be too careful," he said to himself; "that's the way to get her in with this society crowd." And he counselled Brunhilda herself to apply to her friend Mrs. Dodsley — her Letty-lady — when any question of manners troubled her. "She knows more about it in a minute than the rest of 'em could tell you in a year!" said Mr. Hatfield, wisely. Hey, laugh if you will, friends! Or even sneer if you will! I think there have been funnier sights, and ambitions less commendable.

Mr. Hatfield, of course, knew nothing about the recent events in the Dodsley household; it was four or five days after the last recorded that another occurred which was regarded by many members of the community as a direct interposition of Providence in favor of Mrs. John Dodsley, of Mr. John Dodsley, of the Breens generally, of everybody, in short, whom it even remotely concerned. Perhaps Hatfield would not have interpreted

it in exactly such terms ; although he went rigorously to church with Brunhilda, and was reasonably liberal in contribution, he did not pretend a devotion to any creed, and would probably have chuckled a little at the suggestion of Divine intervention in any affairs that nearly touched *him*, at any rate. Policy Jim thought himself quite competent to run his own business, and doubtless he "made good" in his own view, handsomely allowing so much to his personal abilities, so much to other people's foolishness, so much to blind luck. He was not thinking of any of these things, though, when he came downstairs one evening, painstakingly arrayed in what he called his "open-face vest," in his black broadcloth and his white necktie and his patent-leather shoes,—in the regalia which he now assumed nightly for his dinner in the gravest and most correct style. Admire Mr. Hatfield as he enters the Jacobean dining-room which is carved and panelled and lighted and curtained and upholstered in the purest and highest-priced Jacobean taste, so that the master of the house has often wondered privately who in the devil this man Jacobs was, anyhow,—some Jew most likely, Mr. Hatfield thinks,—and what there is in his furniture to make it cost such a thundering lot. Mr. Hatfield's butler stands erect in front of the sideboard ; two maids stand erect opposite him on the other side of the table ; it is richly laid with plate, and expensive flowers adorn the centre of it. Once upon a time Mr. Hatfield would have felt and looked somewhat awkward and self-conscious in the presence of this elegance ; he might even, shocking to remember, have entered into friendly converse with the servants, in his lonesomeness. But we have changed all that. Although he is still abysmally lonesome, he will not utter a word, he will not even send for his little girl until the dessert is brought on, when it is his custom (sanctioned by polite traditions, let us hastily explain !) to have her in for a few minutes before she

goes to bed. Her life is as decorously ruled nowadays as that of an heiress apparent ought to be ; and, besides, nobody has children at the dinner-table — nobody but common people of small means, who don't know any better. So Mr. Hatfield eats solemnly and steadily through the abundant menu ; and at the last, the butler (a man who was with D. W. Gates for nine years, an invaluable servant), observing his master to be directing expectant looks towards the door, ventures to remark deferentially that beg pardon, sir, but he thinks Miss Brunhilda won't be down this evening.

"What's the matter ? She ain't sick ?"

"No, sir, but she ain't feeling just well, on account of —" the servant hesitates — "of Mr. Dodsley, sir."

"Hey ? Dodsley ? What about Mr. Dodsley ?" says Brunhilda's papa, in surprise. The maids glance at each other.

"Beg pardon, sir —" says the butler, again ; and again he hesitates and coughs behind his hand, and rearranges the cigarettes and matches on the tray he is about to offer — "it — it was in the evening paper. He'd been sick some time, you know, sir — and — and he's just died." And with this announcement, which the butler evidently feels to be little less than indecent at a gentleman's dinner-table, the room is somehow, for an instant, very still.

"*What !*" says Mr. Hatfield, and gets to his feet with a sharp movement, shoving back the Jacobean arm-chair. The butler catches it by an amazing feat of dexterity just as it is tottering over. The women stare. "What ! Died ?" cries out Hatfield, again ; "what of ? What did he die of ? Are you *sure* ? He was getting well the last I heard !"

"He had a relapse, sir, the paper says — it was pneumonia — very sudden at the last, the paper says, sir."

CHAPTER VIII

THIS history will not be called upon to record any more deaths and funerals, of which there have already been enough and to spare. But, in fact, it could make nothing at all dramatic or interesting out of Jack Dodsley's, which most people, as has been hinted, piously considered a merciful release; they did not hesitate to express the feeling in their letters to his wife and on their calls of condolence. His best friend, they pointed out, could not wish Mr. Dodsley back in such a life as his had been the past three years; and could her husband have realized his own condition for one moment, he would have prayed to go — he would have been glad and happy to go! Even Mrs. David Dodsley, in the midst of her tears, felt the force of these arguments and agreed with them; it had been hard and painful for her to witness her grandson's condition, and she had never been able to "manage" him — as she herself said — so well as his wife. In truth, at eighty years one does not adjust one's self to such a trial with ease, and poor old Mrs. David had never had much gift at "managing" in her best days. "Oh, it's better so — I know it's better so!" she mournfully acknowledged; "better for him and for all the rest of us, perhaps!"

"And after all, it can't be long now, Maria, it can't be long at our age, before we see them all again!" suggested the old friend who was making this visit, with a companionable sob; "you're eighty, and I will be my next birthday — I'm younger than you, you know — but I often think it can't be long now!"

"Yes," said Maria, rather tepidly. And she afterwards remarked to Letty that Susan Bradley had aged

like anything this last year ; she really was beginning to be childish.

Mrs. John Dodsley herself shed few tears, in public, at any rate ; she was too tired. Also, she had too much to think about, for, whoever dies, the problem of how the rest are to live must be solved by somebody, and was never off Letty's mind for long. She was, however, a good deal touched by the kind and considerate treatment she met with from tradesmen and underlings ; and by a visit from old Mr. Boyle, who came out immediately upon hearing the news and offered her very practical aid, and spoke with regret and affection of the dead man. "But she don't cry at all — you'd think she didn't care — only anybody that's been through it knows she's just *stunned*. She don't realize it yet," Mrs. William Breen explained volubly. "I know exactly how she feels. It's just the way I was when my mother died — I couldn't shed a tear — just *couldn't*. It's awfully bad for you, you know — lots worse than if you *could* cry. That's what the doctor said to me. He kept saying, 'Do *cry*, Mrs. Breen ; do, for Heaven's sakes, cry !' ; he said to me just like that. I said 'Doctor Shouse, *I can't !*' I just sat there this way — with this expression —" said Mrs. William, assuming a truly formidable air of stolidity with a fixed and staring eye ; "that's just the way I was — like a stone. Doctor Shouse was terribly worried about me ; he was afraid I was going to have a nervous breakdown, . . ." and so on — a highly entertaining history.

So Jack died and was gathered to his fathers, nor could anybody in conscience and common-sense regret the poor fellow much ; perhaps the most sincere mourner he had was little Brunhilda Hatfield, who went to the funeral with her poor little homely face quite red and swelled up with honest grief, and sobbed hard in her corner, and would not be comforted, thinking of her dead playmate.

It is strange (and, to this writer's way of thinking at least, a beautiful trait, in its small way, of human beings) the affection we inevitably grow to feel for the thing or person we must take care of, no matter how unworthy or how irksome the care. Letty Breen, who had not loved the man she married, who had been at heart unfaithful to him, had still done her duty towards him at the long last ; and, so doing, felt an increasing fondness for him. She could not choose but love the poor creature who needed her so sorely ; and if his death removed a heavy load, it none the less left her with a sense of loss and loneliness so strong it surprised herself. I daresay she laid awake at night, going over in her mind the scenes and acts of this past three years — of farther back than that, of her whole married life — of her first meetings with her husband. She recalled Jack as he was then, his sweet temper, his eager, happy ways, his fair hair and his fresh honest face and his blue eyes that followed her about with such pride and admiration. She thought about their first years together — they had never had a quarrel. "I know I've spoken sharply to him sometimes, though — I wish I hadn't, oh, I wish I hadn't ! But I always made it up to him — I tried !" Letty said to herself with pain and reproach. Gates came into her mind. "I made *that* up to you, too, Jack — indeed I did !" she spoke aloud in the dark. It was all over now ; for good or bad, it was over. Both of these men were dead, and the past was dead. She was nearly thirty-six years old ; she remembered with something like a smile the time when she had thought of thirty-six as she now thought of fourscore, Mrs. David Dodsley's present age. And at this point she would fall to planning for the care of Jack's grandmother in the future. "I can always manage for myself. I could go into a store or an office, or anything, now that Jack's gone," Letty reflected ; "but the poor old lady — what shall I do with her ?"

This question, in common with some others no less pressing, was still before her unanswered, three or four weeks later, as she sat over her needlework, finishing the orders which had been somewhat retarded by recent events. She worked by lamplight in the quiet house long after the elder Mrs. Dodsley had gone to bed, and even after the little suburban street had likewise settled to its early slumbers; it seemed to Letty startlingly late to hear a foot on her porch at nine o'clock, and she got up and went to the door, almost nervously for her, but somehow was not surprised nor taken aback when she opened to Mr. Hatfield. She had not seen him since the death; and now he walked in, with an air which contrived to be at once assured and apologetic. "How d'ye do? Er — how are you?" said James, earnestly regarding her, and hung up his hat and coat and came into the parlor which should have been pretty familiar to him by this time, glancing about rather uneasily and stiffly. "Hard at it, hey?" he commented, as Letty sat down to her embroidery again.

"Hard at it!" said Letty, cheerfully.

There was a moment of silence. Whatever was the object of Mr. Hatfield's call, setting apart mere good-will, it was certainly not to condole with her, for he uttered nothing tending that way; indeed, he seemed to lack not only words appropriate to the occasion, but any words at all, and took the chair opposite her, shifting restlessly from one attitude to another for fully two minutes, until Letty said, "Don't you want to smoke?"

"Well, if you don't mind — !" said Hatfield, with disproportionate relief and enthusiasm. He got out a cigar, and clipped the end off it — and then sat holding it in his hand apparently forgotten, and staring at her meditatively for so long a space that Letty, finally raising her eyes to thread a needle, encountered his. She looked at him calmly, not even expectantly; she was

used to his rather abrupt ways, and could make herself as companionable to him as to everybody else. And although Mr. Hatfield appeared to be, for his own part, more or less confused and his face turned momentarily a deeper red even than it already was by nature, Letty in her composure, seemed to take no note of it. "Oh, you want the matches?" she said, and set the box towards him.

"I got some," said Hatfield, huskily. He leaned over and added with a curious effort, "That thing you're making — who's it for?"

"This? It's a shirtwaist. It's for Mrs. Underwood — Mrs. Charley, you know."

He grunted "Huh!" and was silent again. Then he said brusquely: "How're you getting on, anyhow? Do they pay you? Is it — are you coming out all right, hey?"

"Oh, yes. I'm doing as well as anybody could, I think."

Hatfield got up, and took a few steps around the room, with his hands in his pockets; he seemed to have forgotten his desire to smoke. He walked away from her, then back, and stood over her glowering moodily. "I hate to see you doing that work — you ain't got any business putting your eyes out over it," he suddenly said with alarming gruffness and vehemence. "I hate to see you working over their damn waists — that is — I — I didn't mean to say that, you know. I just don't like it, that's all." He stopped; then added abruptly in complete contradiction of these first sentiments: "Say, I guess you'd better make some more clothes for Brunhilda, hadn't you? Make her a lot — a whole lot — a-a lot —" his gesture indicated vast horizons of clothes — "about five hundred dollars' worth, to — to start with, and — and then some! That wouldn't be very much, and she needs 'em. Never saw anything like the way that kid can go through clothes — she's grow-



ing like a weed!" said Mr. Hatfield, in extraordinarily eager explanation.

"Why, very well, Mr. Hatfield," Letty said, not without amusement; "but that will make her ever so many clothes — enough for another year, no matter how much she grows. And then I can alter some of her old ones — let them down and make them bigger for her."

"I don't want 'em made bigger. I want 'em all new, and I want you to charge enough for 'em to be *good*!" he said with prodigious severity. And darting to another subject with the same unnatural want of sequence, "Where's the old lady?" he inquired.

"Upstairs," Letty told him. "She's gone to bed."

Mr. Hatfield sat down again, after having strolled aimlessly about during all the above conversation, and leaned forward with his loosely-clasped hands hanging between his knees; and anon he sat back, crossed one foot into his lap, and held that leg and bent knee; it appeared impossible for him to remain in the same position two minutes together. "Say," he asked frowningly, "she ain't going to stay here with you, is she? She ain't going to keep on living with you, hey?"

"Why, of course. Why not?" said Letty, this time thoroughly surprised and showing it.

"*Why not!* Why, she — she hasn't got the shadow of a claim on *you*. It's considerable of a care; she'd ought to go and live with her own people. They're plenty of 'em — she's got a raft of relatives, hasn't she? What's she setting down on *you* for now?"

"Why — why —" Letty looked up in sincere bewilderment. This view of Mrs. David's position had never occurred to her. "Why, she *has* to — I *have* to — don't you see?"

"No, I don't see!" said Hatfield, roughly. Once more he rose up, and rambled about the room, and again came back and stood over her. "Say, Letty," he said hoarsely, "there ain't any use my trying to hide

it, or talking round and round this way, trying to lead up to it. D'ye know what the kid said to me the other day? She says, 'Poppa, I wish Letty-lady would come and live with us and be my momma, don't you?'" He paused, swallowed, and concluded with a kind of humility, "and I — I guess Brunhilda's got it about right, Letty. I guess that's what I want, too."

Letty herself started up; her pale face suddenly glowed. She was unaffectedly startled. "Oh, I can't do *that!*" she said. "You — oughtn't to speak of it, even. I — why — I *can't* do that!" Not in years, perhaps, had she acted on so genuine an impulse, or uttered so free and uncalculated a speech; this had taken her by surprise and unprepared, and shattered her strong reserve at one blow.

"You mean you don't want to?" said Hatfield, now on a sudden quite calm. He watched her put up her hand and smooth the heavy black folds of her hair with a fluttered and uncertain movement; and all his hesitation and confusion seemed to drop away from him as hers visibly increased. "You mean you don't want to?"

"I *can't*," Letty said again, desperately. She was really saying it to herself, answering her own thought.

"Because of the poor fellow that's gone?" Hatfield asked her with a decent gravity. "I know it ain't been very long, but, Letty, he's been as good as dead for going on three years. It's not in reason for you to feel like widows ordinarily do; nobody would expect it of you, nor they wouldn't hardly believe it if you did, even. You stuck to him and done your best for him; nobody could ask any more of you than that. But it's over — it's good and over now. You can't do any more for him. Plugging along at this work, and trying to live on nothing, don't do yourself nor anybody else any good. Nobody'd blame you a mite for —"

"That's not it — at least, that's not all of it," Letty broke in; "I — I don't care for you that way."

"I'm not expecting you to," he said, unmoved; "we ain't either of us as young as we used to be. We ain't a boy and a girl any more, and we don't feel that way about each other so much — that is, *you* don't, anyhow. But we'd be a deal happier married than any boy and girl ever are; we know how better. We'd get along first-rate — you know we would, Letty. I — I sort of need you; I like to think of my little girl being with you. You'd — you'd teach her things. I'd like her to be like you are. I'm a rich man, Letty, you wouldn't be —"

"I know, I know!" Letty cried out, flinching. She had thought of that, alas, already! If he had been a poor man, she bitterly questioned herself, would she have listened to him even for this brief while? Money meant comfort physically, mentally, every way; in this case it meant a great deal more than comfort. She could make something presentable out of him — he was not a dull man — he was likable enough; she could make something out of Brunhilda. It was quite true what he had said about their being happy; of course they would "get along" — hadn't she always known how to "get along" with everybody? she thought in scorn of her own character.

"I guess you've heard stories about me — about how I got my money," said Hatfield, misreading her expression, with a momentary scowl. "Well, all I've got to say is, that ain't anybody's business but mine. I don't go telling stories around, or asking how other men made theirs, though I could if I felt like it, and make 'em squeal, too. I made my money, and it's mine, and I'd like to see any of 'em get it away from me. The law can't lay a finger on me. I'm as good as some men I could name. You know all about me and my people; and I know all about yours. I'm as good as your father or that four-flusher Tom Breen — your uncle, ain't he?

I guess *he* ain't got anything on me. Anyway, that hasn't got anything to do with you and me, has it? It's not got anything to do with *this*. You've got too much of a head on you to care anything for things like that —"

"I know," said Letty again, quickly; "I wasn't thinking of that."

"Well, then, Letty —?"

"I don't care for you that way. I've never cared for anybody in my whole life, I think. I want to be honest for once — I've done so much *pretending*," said Letty, in broken sentences; "I don't want you to think me so much better than I am —"

"Why, what you running yourself down like that for?" Hatfield interrupted her, puzzled and even slightly amused. "Don't I know all about you? Look here, Letty, say you will, and we'll get married the soonest you think will be all right, and go to Europe and stay for six months. We can put Brunhilda in a school over there, and travel around and have a good time. And by the time we get back, all the old cats in town will have had their talk out, and everybody else will forget inside the year that we ain't been married forever. Come on, say you will."

"But old Mrs. Dodsley — and my own family, you know —"

"Oh, Lord, they'll be all right, I'll take care of 'em," Mr. Hatfield assured her; "that is —" he added hastily, "I'll fix it so's they'll be comfortable enough, that old French aunt of yours, and Mrs. Dodsley, too, if you say so — the whole outfit of old women. Come on, say you will."

"Oh, I *can't*!" Letty repeated weakly. But in her heart she knew she would.

Being the other day at the Art Museum in this city, I happened, although there on other business, to stroll

into that set of rooms where the pictures are hung ; and so, by the merest chance, ran point-blank into an old acquaintance, viz. "The Lady with the Sampler." I have known this canvas familiarly these twenty-five years, even remembering it from its first days in Doctor Vardaman's collection back in the '80's, to say nothing of having seen it frequently at the house of its next owner, Mr. Daniel Webster Gates, who bought it for a song at the sale of the doctor's effects somewhere about 1890 or '91. It is hung to the left of the door as you enter that big room where the celebrated painting "Death of Becket" by some English artist, one of the mid-Victorian men — I have forgot his name — is also hanging ; No. 27 in the catalogue, and I perceive they call it now : "Portrait of a Lady. Artist unknown." But I recognized it at once, and went and looked at it with a good deal of interest, noticing that the title is also exhibited on one of those elegant little gilt plaques they affix to the bottom part of the frames, with the additional information that it was "Presented by Mrs. James Hatfield."

I was just about to move away from this contemplation when there entered with a company of other visitors — for the Museum is tolerably well patronized as a place of entertainment and instruction — there entered, I say, a dark and slender and exceedingly well-dressed lady having in tow a gawky young ostrich, perhaps fifteen years old, with a fine braid of auburn hair at the back of her head, and for the rest not at all slender, but as well dressed as a shapeless female at the awkward age could be. It was easy enough to identify this couple ; indeed, Mrs. Hatfield smiled and nodded very pleasantly upon seeing me. She must be every day of forty, but looks youthful still — a pretty woman — or at least she has distinction, which, as one's years advance, may be a more valuable possession than good looks. They were just passing through the city on

their way to Asheville — I found out on joining them — and having a couple of hours to spare, Mrs. Hatfield had brought her daughter here for a look at the picture which, it appears, the young lady had never seen. I remembered then, although — wisely, I am sure — I made no mention of this rather odd fact, that they had never had it hanging up anywhere in those parts of the Hatfield house which I have seen; it would be interesting to know whether that was owing to Mr. Hatfield's prejudices, or his wife's.

"Here it is," she said to her young companion, as they brought up in front of the "Portrait of a Lady"; and we stood by in silence while the girl gazed at it.

"I don't like her," said the latter, at last, with abundant decision. "And, Letty-mama —" by which quaint title, she continually addressed the other — "I don't *see* how anybody can say you look like her — you *don't* the least little tiny *bit*. She looks bad, *I* think. *Was* she?"

"My dear, I don't know. Even if she was bad, there may have been a little good in her, after all. We can't tell what things happened to her in her life, you know; and the things that happen have a great deal to do with it."

"Oh, Letty-mama, that's just like you — you're always thinking up the nicest thing you can to say about people. You just never *knock* anybody!" cried the youngster, seizing her stepmother's hand in a colt-like transport; "you're always just so *good* — *always*!"

Mrs. Hatfield smiled and silenced her. I never saw anything quite so uncanny as her resemblance to the picture when she smiled; and perhaps she saw it herself, for her eyes encountering the painted ones at that moment, the smile vanished. She looked at it gravely, thoughtfully, as if she might be saying to herself: "Am *I* a good woman — a bad woman? I do not know."

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